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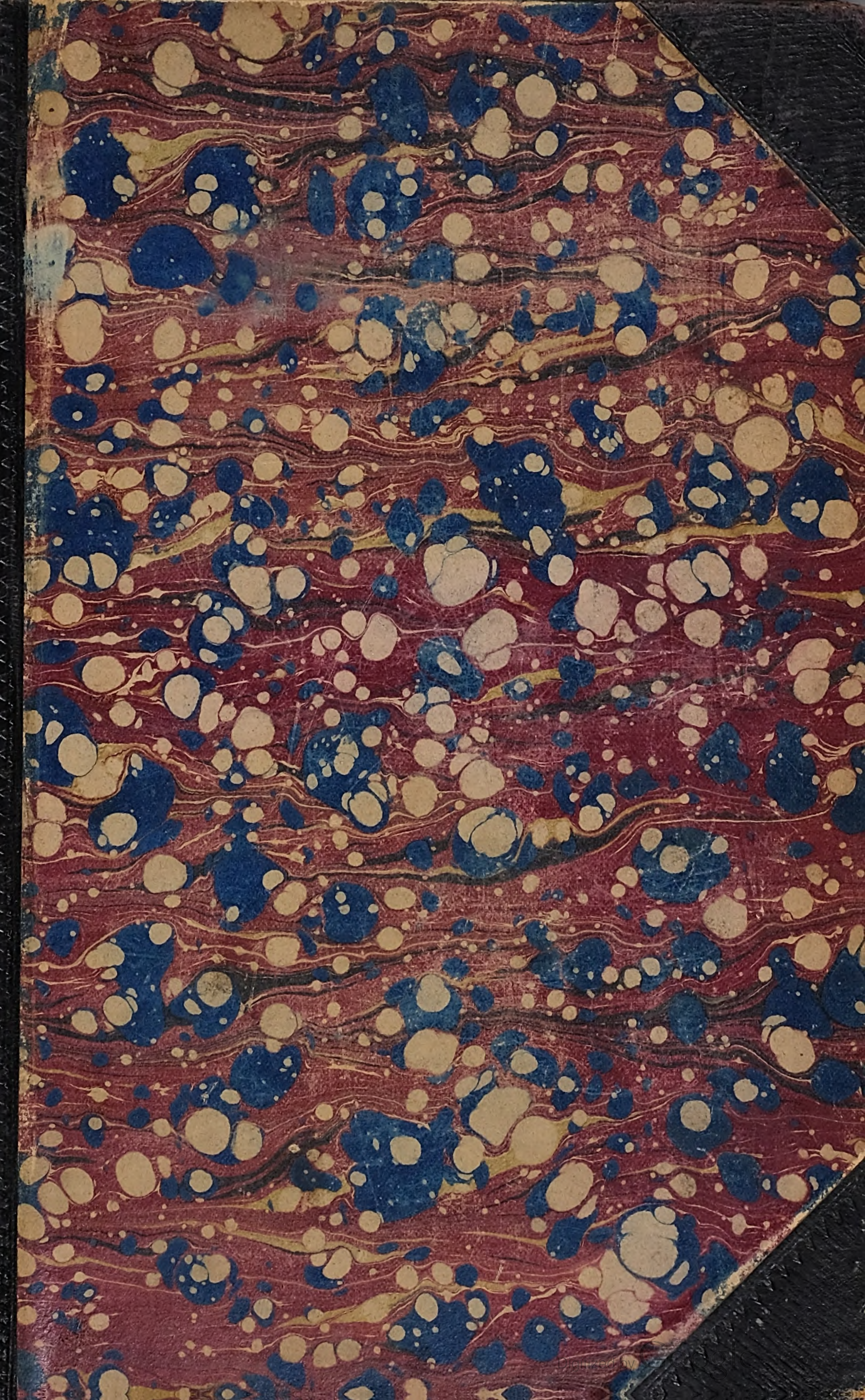

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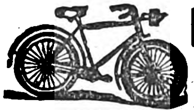

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No. 345.] [ONE PENNY.

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

For the Week ending August 10th, 1895.

A Study in Pink.

ZIE called her the Pink Nurse. And that settled it. After that it was no longer Annie Durrant, but "Our Pink Nurse," with the whole family, and it even came to pass that she was known throughout the village as "Brigg's Pink Nurse." And the name fitted her well enough, on the whole, as her hospital gown—she was a trained nurse—her plump cheeks, and even her dimpled hands, and the ribbons on her stiff cap were each and all a most lively pink.

It all happened the summer that brought Zie her fifth birthday, when the family were down in our country cottage by the sea, and when a mighty battle was being fought in a big front room upstairs between a strange mystery we call death, and two famous physicians, seconded ably by our Pink Nurse.

For granny was gazing past us all in the gloom, and, dove-like and gentle, with all serenity, was bidding us farewell with a certain stately tenderness which was all her own.

And Zie was the only one who was happy. And she was happy, as she always is happy, because she cannot, for her life, help being so. It is as much a part of her as her freckled little nose, yellow mop of hair, and topaz eyes.

One blue spring morning, after our invalid had had a bad night, and our Pink Nurse was far more white than pink, she was sent into the old-fashioned garden to steal a little colour from the soft air.

Zie immediately extended the hospitality of her hammock, which was stretched lazily between two snowy, blossoming May trees, and there the two sat, and were very glad they were alive, for it was the month of May, which will at once explain that gladness.

"You are very pretty!" said Zie, gravely, by way of being agreeable. "I'm pretty, too. I'm glad. Aren't you?"

"Oh—I don't know."

"That doesn't sound true. Are you married?" pursued Zie.

"No."

"Why don't you get married?" she asked next.

"Nobody wants me!" rippled out the Pink Nurse, with a little laugh.

"But your name is Annie. Hasn't every Annie got a Joe?" remarked Zie, with amazement.

And the story would have ended here before it began if a man at that moment had not been passing. There was nothing singular about his being there, or in the fact that his name should be Joe—Joe Ripley. But after he passed, it was a little singular that the back of his neck and ears should so closely match our Pink Nurse's face, who was blushing also.

"Oh, you awful child! What will you do or say next? That was the gentleman in Mr. Peters' office, and his name is Joe." And the Pink Nurse made a great pretence of being painfully shocked, and ran, with a great rustle of skirts, into the house.

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"And *her* name is Annie," added Zie to herself, while the pupils of her eyes grew very big, and the little bits of gold dust in them disappeared, and the rest of the day she was very quiet.

"That child's got something on her mind!" announced Harriet in the kitchen, as her glances roamed across the green of the lawn, to the hammock under the blossoming May trees. For the hammock hardly moved.

Now the gentleman in Mr. Peters' office lived just up the hill, only a few doors from our cottage, and Zie's hammock was very near the road on which he passed to and fro several times a day.

That evening a surprise was in store for Mr. Ripley. Just at dusk, while all things were assuming the grey-greens of the twilight, he walked soberly home to supper. When exactly opposite a certain hammock a small voice piped up in an authoritative manner:

"Will you please be kind enough to come here?"

Mr. Ripley thoughtfully rubbed his right foot over his left foot, took his handkerchief out of the crown of his straw hat, and, after wiping his face, carefully replaced it. Then followed the suggestions offered by the small voice:

"Well, kid! What is it?"

"I'm not a kid. I'm a girl. And my name is Zie. I didn't know until to-day that your name was Joe. Our Pink Nurse told me. Would you mind telling me if you've an Annie—already?"

"I've no Annie," and Mr. Ripley grinned.

"Would you like one?"

"*I* don't mind."

"Because—I know one."

"Really?"

"Yes. That's our Pink Nurse's name. She watches you from behind the curtain."

"Really?"

"That's all," added Zie, with dignity. "You can go now."

And Mr. Ripley went home, but he has since confessed that he never felt so queer in all his life.

And in fact Mr. Ripley, the clerk in Mr. Peters' office, began to act as if under some sort of spell. Just in front of our cottage there was a loose plank in the little bridge which crossed the stream. It was a singular fact that the window where the Pink Nurse lurked commanded a view of this loose plank.

Now, avoid that plank as he would, Mr. Ripley no sooner reached that spot each day, in the full consciousness of the eyes behind the window curtain, and the calm judicious aspect of the small figure in the hammock, than some demon lured him to it, brought up his toes against it, and allowed him to pass on, with neck and ears a perfect match to the Pink Nurse.

One day he distinctly heard a titter from behind the curtain.

"Never mind," came the small voice from the hammock, "she likes you just the same, if she does laugh at you. She wouldn't watch for you every day, you know, if she didn't." Which was a sensible conclusion for a five-year-old girl.

But that plank grew to be a nightmare to Mr. Ripley. Every day he found it there.

One night at midnight Zie had a dream. All in the moonlight of a perfect May night she heard the fairies:

"Knock! knock! knock!"

"It sounded *real*," she announced over her oatmeal porridge. And it probably was, to some extent, for the plank was found firmly fixed in its place that morning by three bright new nails.

"*It's coming true*," whispered Zie to herself, and she told the same thing in strict confidence to three intimate friends, after the fashion of her sex. But as they happened to be merely a toad, a demure lady-bird, and a gaudy little bullfinch, the secret was still a secret.

That night when Mr. Ripley went home to his supper, Zie sat on the garden gate.

"Did you nail it?" she promptly asked.

"Nail what?" responded Mr. Ripley, with a brief glance at the window curtain.

"The plank. I think it was a fairy. *She* thinks it was you. Was it?"

But Mr. Ripley passed on speechless.

And as he went he was quite angry to find himself marching to the tune of

Soon they'll be married,
Never to part.

And, on the last day of May, when the hawthorn blossoms lay like silver snow upon the lawn, Zie propounded a remarkable question just after luncheon.

"Do all men say they never kissed anyone else in all their lives? When they get engaged, I mean," she asked, with her mouth full of sponge cake.

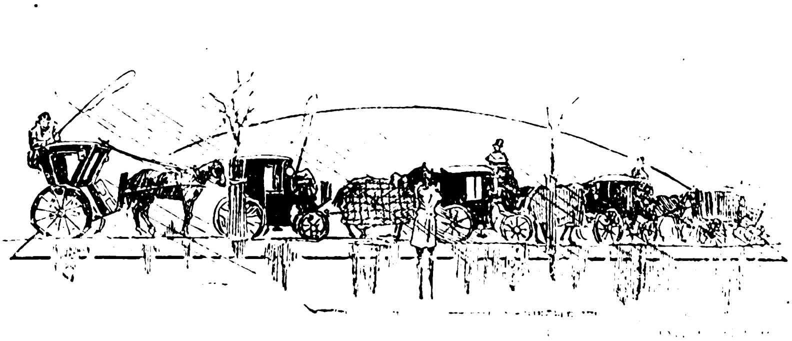
"What *can* the child mean?" ejaculated Aunt Louise, in amazement.

Zie sat up very straight.

"I mean that Annie's got a Joe, now. Oh, it's true! And they say that I'm a darling—but I knew that—always. And Joe told Annie that she was the very first girl he had ever loved, and she wouldn't believe him—but she didn't mind one bit. Why wouldn't she believe him?"

"Because—they all say that," explained mamma, stirring the cream in a cup of coffee.

Mary Bryan.



IT CAME TO PASS

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM

CHAPTER I.

“I WANT to see the world. I want to see life.” It was Charlotte who spoke, leaning back on a mound of hay, with her hands clasped behind her head. “I wish I could grow old suddenly. I should like to be thirty.”

Her companion smiled. He was an elderly man, with a low, melodious voice.

“There are many women of that age,” he said, “who would gladly change places.”

“Not with me?”

Charlotte asked the question wonderingly, raising her tall young figure on her elbow.

“Yes, with you.”

She shook her head.

“I think not.”

“Then the summit of your ambition is to be old?”

“I am not happy,” she replied. “I have no girl-friend now. I do not care to make one. I prefer married women and—and——”

“Men?”

“Yes,” raising her eyes innocently to his. “I like men and boys.”

“You have left school?”

“Some months ago, but I still study. I do not mind working here, because I am allowed to bring my books into the fields and learn in the open air. They say I have outgrown my strength—I am so ridiculously tall!”

“And did you like your school?”

“Like it! Good gracious, no! You have never been to a girls' school, or you would not ask. It is a process of cramping every original idea from term to term, and moulding you in the same groove with the common herd. Your very soul is not your own. You are nothing but a slave of routine, and have only the mark of the beast in place of individuality.”

“Can nothing wipe it out?” he asked, smiling.

“Oh, yes; when you are introduced into Society—or married—or something,” speaking vaguely, as she plucked at the withered grass. “I do not regret my lost childhood, and I long to manage my own life—it will be so interesting. Responsibility never did anybody harm yet.”

“Though the flowing hair is seen no more,” said the man, looking at her beautifully-shaped head, “its past is not dead, but lives in its present, its crowning glory merely supported by the staid and womanly hairpin. So that lost childhood is not lost, but gathered up and permeated by the hairpin of responsibility.”

The sun crept through the hedge, sweet with garlands of dog-roses, amongst which the tiny blue-winged butterflies flitted, and Charlotte watched them with a dreamy smile.

“Do you know, the other girls wonder at my talking so much to you. They say I am too young to have anything in common with a man years my senior.”

“What other girls?” he asked, contracting his eyebrows.

“Oh! my cousins, and the people you are staying with. They would be very angry now if they knew you were here in the hayfield. You won't tell them, will you?”

An anxious expression crept over Charlotte's face.

“My dear child, why should I?”

“You might have mentioned it without thinking, and——” blushing, she stopped short.

“And what?” he asked, eagerly.

“Well, I am supposed to be having a music lesson.”

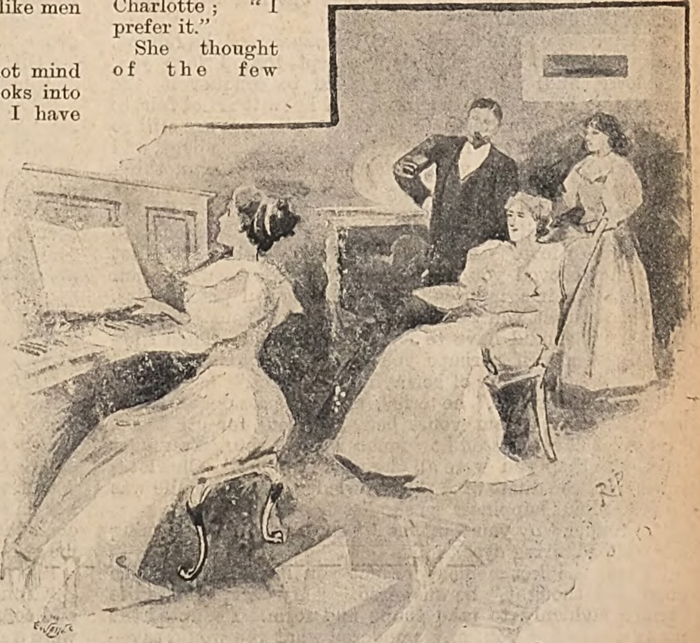
“I will teach you something sweeter than song,” he whispered.

“I don't think you could, for I am very fond of melody, as a rule.”

“Yet you prefer to lie here and dream?”

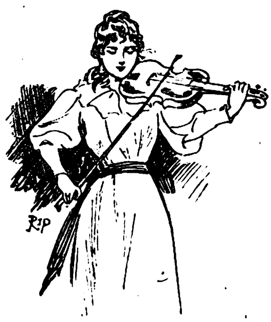
“Yes,” replied Charlotte; “I prefer it.”

She thought of the few



“My cousins and the people you are staying with.”

enchanting hours that remained to her, before he went, perhaps for ever. All their meetings had been purely accidental—at least, from her point of view, and yet this stranger would leave behind him a dread sense of emptiness in the young girl's heart. She pushed the hay aside and leant forward, her hands clasped together, a favourite pose of hers, and looked at him steadfastly.



"*I am supposed to be having a music lesson.*"

"Where do you live?" she said.

"In London," he replied.

"And is the life there very different to our humdrum country existence?"

"To a certain extent. We have not the same peace and quiet."

"What a comfort! How you must love your life!"

"Indeed I do not. I have everything but the one thing I want, and that I dare not ask for. It is beyond my reach."

"I do not like to hear you talk so," declared Charlotte, twisting the parched grasses through her fingers. "It seems unmanly. If you had any stamina or determination you would never sit there and calmly say those hateful words, 'I dare not.' There is nothing more despicable than a coward! What is it you 'dare not' ask for—you who look so strong and capable?"

She shot a look of disdain at him through her long eyelashes.

"I want you," he said, boldly, gazing at her peach-like bloom, and the pretty mutinous mouth, which became suddenly subdued into calm and serious lines. "That is all, Charlotte—I want *you*."

"Then—then, it is very unkind of you to say so!" she began, with something like tears in her stormy blue eyes. "Can't you see what a dreadful position you have placed me in? I—I—have asked you to—to——"

She could not finish her sentence, but hid her flushed face in the haycock.

"I have no excuse to offer for my *gaucherie*," he replied, drawing her to him tenderly, "except that I love you, Charlotte, and, though I have tried to conquer it, the temptation has proved too strong. I know it is not fair to try and make you listen to me now, while you are still so young, in fact not yet freed from schoolroom bondage, and I am old enough to be your father. You have seen nothing of the world, you are too young to judge."

"Young!" she cried, starting up, "young! Why do you taunt me with my youth? Surely I am old enough to understand 'love.' I am not such a baby that I did not know that I loved you from the very first moment we met. I have been imagining all sorts of dreadful possibilities. First I thought you would marry my eldest cousin Rachel, and that I should have to be her bridesmaid. Then I began to wonder if perhaps you were already married, and dared not ask for fear of betraying my secret."

"Dearest, dearest," he cried, raining passionate kisses upon her face, "I am yours body and soul, for all times. You must have guessed how much I loved you. You must have seen that you were all the world to me!" Charlotte sat motionless, dumb with the knowledge, yet her smile was one of radiant happiness as she listened to his words.

"I wonder why you want me?" she said at last, turning her wide admiring eyes to his.

"From the first moment we met you have been my one hope and thought," he answered. "My dark, sunless life seemed suddenly to take shape and form. I counted the hours to seeing you, and wondered what you would say—how you would look—if you would smile. Then I told myself I was old—too old for a sweet unspotted soul—too old to gain the fresh first love of any girl, much less yours! Sometimes I decided never to broach the subject, but to bury it away in my heart for ever. You were, I thought, so gay and high-spirited you would not care for a man of my age. Then to-day you seemed sad and lonely, and I fancied you needed me. Oh! Charlotte, Charlotte! how is it I have found favour in your eyes?"

"Raymond," she said—and it was the first time she had called him by that name—"Raymond, I am not so young as you imagine, but I will tell you something of my life. I am, as you know, an orphan, living under the care of my uncle. His own children naturally prove his first consideration, and there is no real place for me. I am not wanted. The elder girls being still unmarried, I have remained in the background, as a schoolgirl, out of sight. I own I was growing tired of my seclusion, and wanted to feel my wings. Take me away from this cramped, narrow circle, and let me learn what life really is. There is no one to miss me—no one—and they will be glad to see me go."

She spoke a little bitterly, and for the first time Raymond caught a glimpse of her inner life, with its unknown worries and heart-burnings. The knowledge seemed to draw her closer to him.

"You have troubles I never suspected," he said. "I pictured you always like a butterfly here in the fields, without a care or serious thought in the world. But the butterfly's wings are not dimmed because it has begun to think."

"And such wonderful thoughts!" said Charlotte; "a whole new lifetime to consider, a bright, beautiful future, so different—so utterly different to the morning."

"I feel like a boy," laughed Raymond; "you have made me too happy! Do you know, Charlotte, I shall never grow really old, for you will revive my youth?"

"And make you re-live it," she added, tenderly.

A pained expression stole over his regular features, and he turned his face away.

"Not that, dear," he murmured. "It isn't fit to live again, even in fancy. Thank God! we are not punished for the sins and follies of the past by having to drag through them a second time."

"Raymond, how sad and strange you look! What have I said to trouble you?"

"Nothing, dear, nothing. But you are so good and generous, I want to ask a favour of you."

"Oh! I am glad," she cried. "I would do anything! Anything!"

"Then listen. I am a widower, Charlotte. Years ago I married, and lost my wife. Will you let that episode remain for ever dead and buried between us? Never allude to it—never speak of it. I only pray that my future may be better and brighter than my past. Heaven knows I will do all in my power to prove myself worthy of you. I will cherish you, Charlotte, with a love greater than any that could be offered to you in all the world. But make me one promise; never mention my past life. It was a sad and a bad one; let me forget it!"

Charlotte was touched by his evident distress, and poured soft words of consolation into his ears as she gave him the promise faithfully.

"I want to hear nothing that is painful to you," she assured him. "The present and the future are enough for me. I shall live from to-day. There was no yesterday for either of us, and we will only have one long series of delightful to-morrows."

"How good, how very good you are!" he cried, clasping her hands fervently. "But one question more before we close the subject for ever. Would you be willing to take me under any circumstances, darling? If I told you——"

She placed her fingers over his mouth, and smiled.

"You need tell me nothing. See, I have perfect trust and confidence in you, Raymond. I would marry you if you were a murderer, with a list of crimes as long as your arm."

So the old, old story was repeated yet again, as they vowed everlasting fidelity in the soft nest of hay, under the blazing summer sun. With all her heart and soul Charlotte surrendered her entire being to the first love of her young life—that life so scattered with thorns in her uncle's home. The thought of escaping it, and marrying the man she loved, brought such a glorious tinge of scarlet to her naturally pale face, that she had never looked more lovely.

One might have imagined from Charlotte's description that she was a penniless orphan, left on the charity of relatives. This, however, was not the case. She had a comfortable income of her own, which, with her striking appearance, made her cousins fear her rivalship. They always considered her an interloper, and not infrequently Charlotte had fostered wild ideas of living alone, freed from their criticism. She pictured a little hut, among dull-coloured, prickly shrubs, in the heart of a wild forest, where time would pass for her like a fairy tale. And now the darkest passage of her life was over, since one at last would be her very own. She felt almost glad never to have known a parent's or any human love, since her stored up affection was all for him. Raymond gazed up at the summer sky—that deep, azure sphere, blue, open, and cloudless as Charlotte's eyes, while she lay before him, flushed and excited, her bright hair dishevelled from contact with the hay—the most beautiful object in all the green landscape.

Admiration kept him silent for some moments, and then he spoke.

"Tell me your thoughts, Charlotte," he said, gently. "They must be very interesting."

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Something in your eyes told me," he replied, caressingly.

"When a woman marries," she began, emphasising the words with pride, "does she confess her past? Will you answer me that question?"

Raymond smiled indulgently.

"If she is good—yes."

"And if she is bad—no," added Charlotte, imitating his tone. "It would be too dangerous—she might lose him."

"My dear child, what do you know about such things?" he said.

"Very little. My experience is limited, or I should not have asked your advice."

She plucked nervously at the jessamine in her dress, gazing through the soft gleam of bright hazy distance across the fields to where the river filtered through sunlight and shade. An anxious look crept into her eyes.

"Dearest, what troubles you?" he asked.

She turned to him with a little gasp.

"Perhaps," she exclaimed, her face dyed with innocent blushes, "I ought to tell you of the one black spot in my life."

"You can have nothing to reveal," he cried, laughing in spite of her distress.

"So you think. But it is dreadful—positively dreadful!" shuddering, and covering her face. "I must tell you, or I should never have a happy moment. If, when you hear all, you feel changed towards me, don't speak—don't say one word—but just walk quietly away, right away, and never let me see you again."

"Charlotte, for pity's sake, if you are joking, remember my love, and spare me."

The pain in his voice touched her, and she looked up with a faint smile.

"I am quite earnest," she replied; "but perhaps you will look leniently upon my case as I would do on yours. I was very young——"

"You must have been."

"And ignorant. I did not realise my action was worthy of imprisonment."

"Imprisonment! My God!"

"Yes," with a solemn shake of her head, "bad enough for that."

Raymond's hands were trembling as he pressed them to his forehead.

"Go on," he cried, hoarsely. "Tell me all."

The day seemed to have grown dark suddenly and the air cold. It struck a chill to his heart as he feasted his eyes hungrily upon Charlotte, and waited for her to continue.

"Yes," she said, pushing the hair from her temples with a nervous gesture. "I am afraid it will shock you terribly. I feel I have reached a crisis in my life. You won't interrupt me?"

"No; only for Heaven's sake don't torture me longer than necessary. I cannot believe you were ever—in prison!"

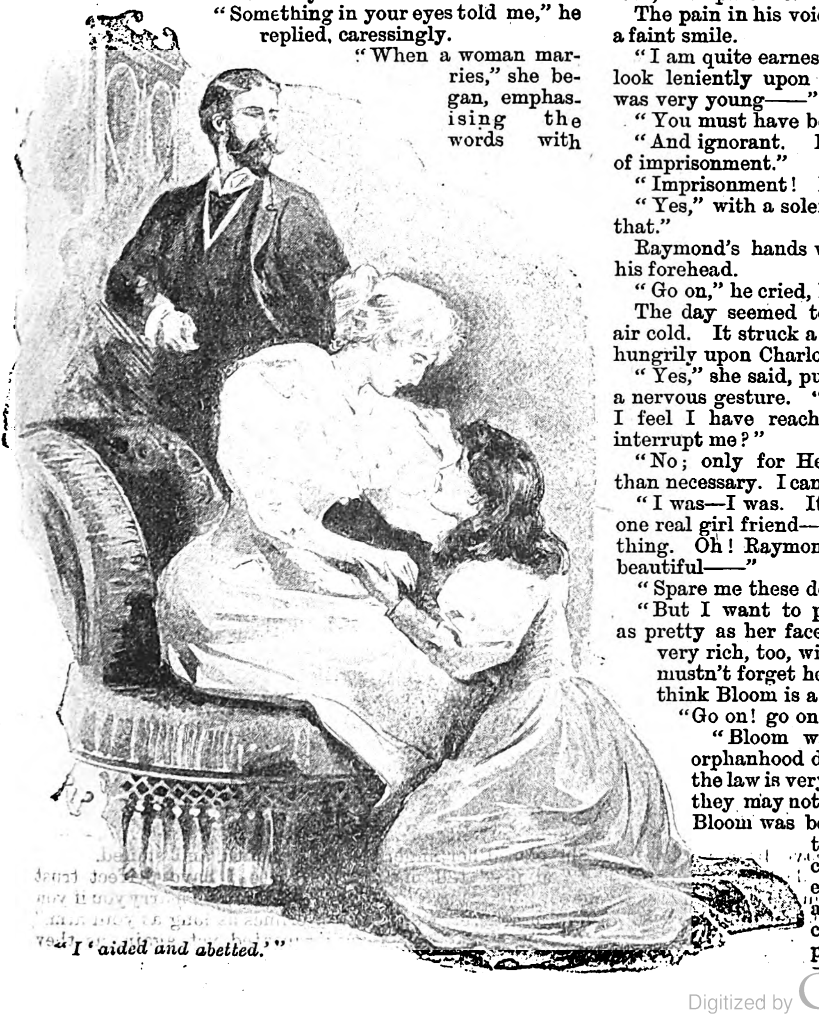
"I was—I was. It is true! I will tell you. I had but one real girl friend—she made me her confidante in everything. Oh! Raymond, you would have liked her—she was beautiful——"

"Spare me these details."

"But I want to picture her to you. Her manners were as pretty as her face, and everybody loved her. She was very rich, too, with houses and lands of her own. But I mustn't forget her name. It was Bloom. Don't you think Bloom is a lovely name?"

"Go on! go on!"

"Bloom was a ward in Chancery. I think our orphanhood drew us together. Perhaps you know the law is very strict about wards in Chancery, and they may not please themselves in marriage. Now, Bloom was bent on pleasing herself, well knowing that the law would not approve her choice. She and her lover planned an elopement, and, oh! Raymond, *I* 'aided and abetted'—that is what the lawyers called it—and so they put me in prison for—one day![*] Now you



"I 'aided and abetted.'"

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[*] A Fact.

have heard the worst. I can plead no excuse, except that her sorrow appealed to me. She was the only girl that could still look pretty when she cried, and, oh, how she did cry! I sat up all one night comforting her."

"My little white-souled darling," he cried, clasping her in his arms, "there is nothing in all this to cause you a shade of sorrow. If the pages of my history were only half as clear I should have needed no promise of silence from you."

"Oh! Raymond, I am so relieved! I did not like telling you, knowing I had done wrong, but nobody could resist Bloom."

So the first cloud rolled aside, and all the world was a blaze of sunshine and roses again as they wended their way back. The little drama in the hayfield was over, and Charlotte had brushed the withered grasses from her cotton gown, and scattered them to the winds. Hand in hand, like children, they passed through the meadows and along the banks of the silent river.

"It is very hot," sighed Charlotte. "I think we shall have a storm."

"Oh! no," he replied, "the sky is too clear." He glanced up and saw a range of purple splendour in the horizon, while a dark curtain of rain in violet-coloured streaks hung from the black edge of a thunder cloud. "It will come," said Raymond.

CHAPTER II.

Charlotte had taken him for better, for worse—Ramond Peel, the widower, in his forty-fifth year.

"Do you remember," she said, glancing over the papers on his study table, "I wanted to see the world. Well, if 'seeing the world' consists of martyring oneself at afternoon 'at home's,' I think I have had enough of it."

Her husband smiled as he looked up from his letters, drawing Charlotte to his side.

"Why did you go?" he asked.

"I promised Lady Logan, and I did not want to appear rude. Besides, it is impossible always to anticipate boredom, occasionally a very slight element dispels it. Town people are so oppressive with their everlasting chatter. I believe our honeymoon has spoilt me, and I only care, dear, to be with you. Lady Logan talked of nothing but her pauper boys (by the way, I promised her a subscription). Then I was introduced to a Dutchman, with a very flat face and yellow hair—great on the subject of vague and hazy impressionist pictures. He pointed out a horrible staring figure over the door, and asked me to admire 'the sweet human look of love and trust' on its emaciated features. I told him it was lamentable, upon which he handed me over in disgust to an exasperating old baronet, who had no conversation above the advance of sanitary science."

"Poor child, I pity you."

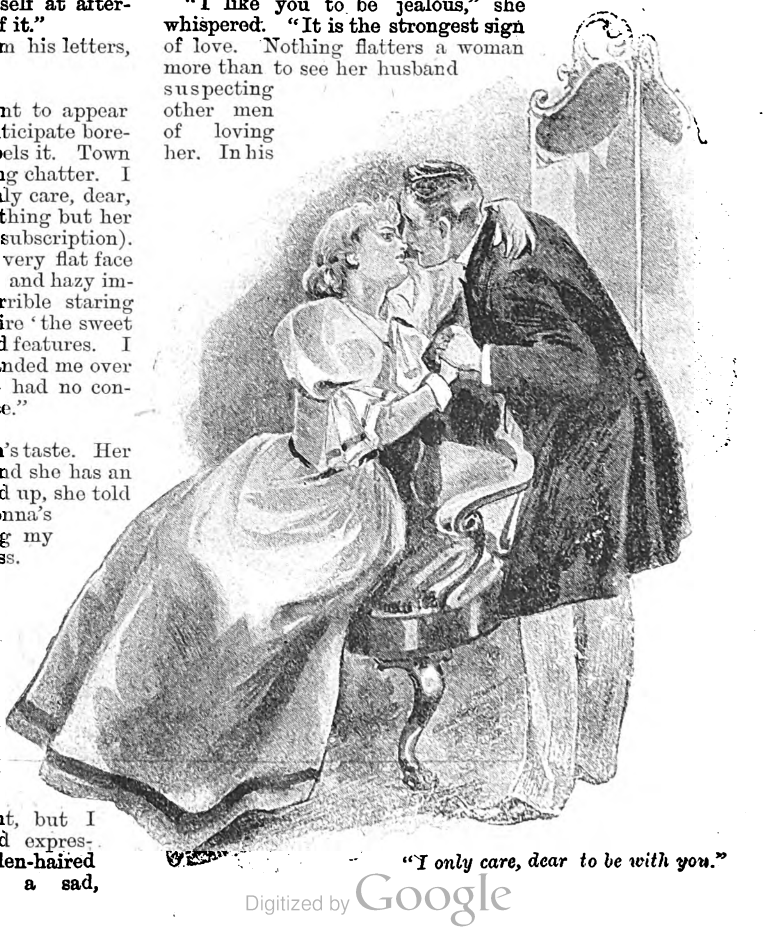
"I consoled myself by studying Lady Logan's taste. Her drawing-room is a dream of mellow beauty, and she has an exquisitely carved altar in an alcove, picked up, she told me, in Antwerp. Her husband admired the Madonna's profile. Oh, but I forgot, while bemoaning my stupid afternoon, that it was not all weariness. There was one star."

"And that?"

"A pale, sad-eyed boy, whom Lady Logan hired out of charity, 'to fiddle,' as she expressed it. I am always sorry for professionals when not in the first rank—they look so out of it. He did not seem to belong to the party, and they gave him sandwiches and claret in a separate room. Yet I never saw a more refined face—the boy was a gentleman, every inch of him. They tell me he is not great enough to push his way to the front, but I considered his was the sweetest pathos and expression I had ever heard. He was like a golden-haired angel standing above us playing, with a sad, wrapt look in his eyes. I pictured a halo and a harp involuntarily, with a gown of fine, white linen. I am sure he won't live, he had the sort of complexion that dies young. I fancied him making one wild supplication to the crowd of worldlings through the medium of music—a cry they would never understand—an appeal from Heaven. Oh! Raymond, it made me so angry—everybody talked—I alone listened. The instrument seemed to speak straight from his soul to mine, and the harrowing tales of fever-infested districts fell on deaf ears. My old baronet could not even get a grunt of approval or disapproval out of me. The Dutchman still discoursed in sonorous tones to my left-hand neighbour on Lady Logan's grotesque objects of art, but I was free, drinking in the soft, throbbing notes. I was back once more in a summer hay-field, listening again to the trilling of birds—and then to the low growl of thunder. Gradually, it seemed, the shades of evening gathered, and a broad, red moon rose behind feathery branches. I could hear the lark's good-night psalm. That is what I call *music*, Raymond! Directly the last strain had died away I asked for an introduction to the talented young musician. My hostess raised her eyebrows and condescended to make him known. The boy flushed crimson, and appeared quite unnerved by my enthusiasm. He played again before I left, and the second time with more confidence and assurance. He said he was greatly affected in tone, touch, and actual execution by his audience. Do you know, Raymond, his eyes reminded me of yours?"

"You must not make me jealous of the rising generation! I strongly object to your starting a handsome young *protégé*," he said, fondly.

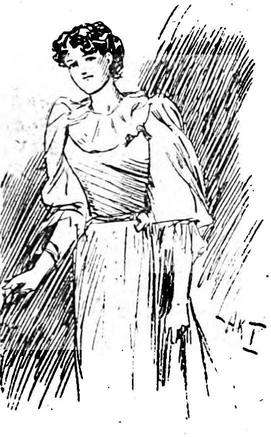
"I like you to be jealous," she whispered. "It is the strongest sign of love. Nothing flatters a woman more than to see her husband suspecting other men of loving her. In his



"I only care, dear to be with you."

eyes she has such a power to charm that he pictures a victim at every turn, since to him she is the most lovable human being."

The fresh, unsophisticated country girl looked impressively dignified as she rose and glanced down on Raymond Peel with those strikingly brilliant eyes which first attracted him.



"I became the success of the season."

"I am taller than Lady Logan," she continued, with a return of her childish manner, catching sight of her elegant figure in the glass. "I am five foot nine," with conscious pride. "My height annoyed me in old days. I was branded by that ugly term, 'a strapping girl.' There is something so unromantic in the expression. But one night, shortly after we returned from our honeymoon, I overheard somebody say at a dance: 'That is Charlotte Peel. She is a very fine woman!' which only points the difference between a holland frock in the country and white satin and diamonds in town."

He liked to hear her prattle on, one moment harping back to her strangely recent childhood, and the next playing the part of the over-indulged wife, and exacting from him the homage of a subject to a queen.

Charlotte had walked to the window and pushed back the curtains.

"There is a strange lady at our door," she said, "and it is late for callers."

Her husband was writing a letter, and vouchsafed no reply.

"I shall have to go and talk to her, I suppose," sighed Charlotte, seeing Raymond pre-occupied, "and I am sure I have no conversation to-day. I wish it were man's mission to receive visitors and dispense tea; it would save women an infinity of trouble." She made a wry face, and moved slowly towards the door.

"Who is it?" she asked, as the manservant appeared.

"The lady would not give her name, madam, but she asked for Mr. Peel."

"Raymond, the visitor has come to see *you*. Who can she be? Ah! perhaps she wants a subscription, and fancies she will wheedle a larger one out of a pliable man."

"Say I am not at home."

"Nonsense!" cried Charlotte, "she has already been admitted, and is probably raging below at your delay. Besides, I am really afraid that laziness is contagious, and you have caught it from me. Shall you see her alone, dear? She is dangerously handsome!"

"Silly girl!" laughed Raymond, pulling her arm through his, "as if I should let you desert me when I most need your support."

"I am frightfully curious," she whispered, "yet I feel rather shy of the woman in red."

As they entered the drawing-room there was a *frou-frou* of silken skirts, and the lady swept forward with an exclamation of delight.

"Raymond!" she cried, holding out both hands, "I meant to surprise you! Is it not wonderful that we should meet in the land of the living after all these years? I only learnt half an hour ago that you were married, and you could have knocked me down with a feather! Not one of the storms I weathered at sea gave me half such a shock, and I had a rough passage. 'Why! he must be a hundred,' I said. So this, I presume, is Mrs. Peel; glad to see you, my dear."

She had spoken without pausing, in a strong colonial accent, while she emphasised her words with gesticulations.

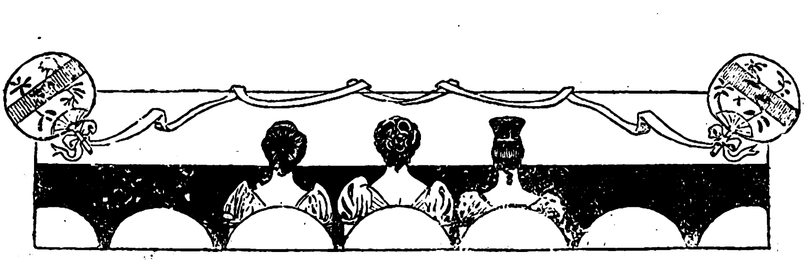
Charlotte glancing at her husband, fancied he appeared less anxious to renew the acquaintance than his voluble friend. To her surprise his face was pale, and for the first time she found him at a loss for words.

"So you knew my husband long ago?" she said, filling in the gap, yet feeling strangely undemonstrative after the Australian's gush.

"Yes, Charlotte, this is Mrs. Donnington-Bain," replied Raymond.

"And he was struck dumb with astonishment when I descended upon him like a whirlwind," continued the visitor, scrutinising Charlotte. "But," turning to Raymond, "after you left Australia, things did not go well with me. I dropped a pile of money in some bogus companies, and was finally wrecked by the failure of a bank. Then I said to myself, 'Augusta, you have wits and talent. Don't let poverty drag you down. Rise up, and see if you can't take the population by storm. Go on the stage.' You may think I was old to begin, but I was always mad about theatricals, and the managers thought my appearance so satisfactory that they took me on spec. Their good judgment was rewarded, and I became the success of the season. At first I appealed to the vulgar taste, and played low comedy; but I got sick of that. My contempt for the whole thing was so profound that it robbed me of all enjoyment. Then I suddenly leapt into tragedy, and from Australia I went to America, where I have toured for the last five years, playing everything but Ibsen. Having established my reputation there, I arranged for a flying visit to London, and find myself free from want and much sought after. Plucky step, wasn't it?"

(To be continued.)



AN ARDENT WOOER

YOUNG, brave, intelligent, Ferreol's principle of life was to be astonished at nothing. Moreover, he lacked nothing. At Paris he encountered Angele. He loved her, and told her so. She listened. He mentioned marriage.

Angele was as good as pretty.

"Have you a family?" asked Ferreol.

"A father; yes."

"Where is he?"

"Brest."

"What doing?"

"Re-fitting vessels."

"I will go at once, then," said Ferreol, calmly.

"Why?"

"To demand your hand. I love you—you love me. You do love me?"

"Yes."

"Good. The train leaves at eight this evening. At eleven to-morrow I land at Brest. Thirty minutes later arrive at the dock; see your father; ask him the question; receive consent at 3 p.m.; take the train back, and the day after to-morrow, at seven in the evening, say to you, 'Angele, thou art mine!"

She blushed, smiled coyly, and softly murmured: "Go, then."

Ferreol took a hansom; the driver was tipsy. It did not astonish him. In the waiting-room his trunk was stolen. Nothing astonishing in that. Then the train ran off the line. Pooh! child's play! Ferreol had his nose half-broken. Ridiculous obstacle!

Briely, it was not till the third day after his departure from Paris that Ferreol arrived at Brest, and swift as a startled zebra, he rushed through the Rue de Siam.

"The ship-refitting shops?"

"Rue de Penfold, third building on the left."

He took it at full speed to make up for lost time, to presently halt before a building on which was the magic word:

REFITTERS.

Before him was a door. He knocked, entered, perceived a gloomy hall, a dingy camp-bed, on that bed a sailor smoking a cob pipe.

"Monsieur Kenezek?" said Ferreol, civilly.

"Yonder, or maybe below."

"Then I'll go and find him at work."

"Thou, my chicken?"

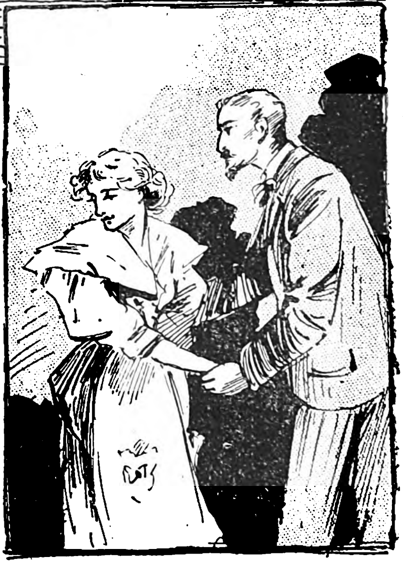
"Why not?"

"It would be——"

"Bah! no phrases! Speak to Monsieur Kenezek I must on business that admits of no delay, and I *will* speak to him at once, if I have to go to the bottom to do it."

The sailor rose instantly, shifted pipe and quid from right to left, and cried out admiringly:

"Thou, too, then, art of the craft, my chicken?"



Ferreol comprehended nothing, but his principles dictated his answer.

"Yes," said he, turning with decision.

"Come on, then. Two steps away only, but you'll dress yourself here."

Dress himself, and here? Anyone but Ferreol would have let escape him at least a gesture of surprise, but he—never! After all, to present himself to a future father-in-law, perhaps it was more expedient to assume a black coat.

"So be it!" replied he.

The sailor moved a step to the door, but stopped thoughtfully, turned, unhooked from the wall a greasy placard, and with a mumbling, "No humbug this, you see!" began to read and to question Ferreol as follows:

"You are not in a state of intoxication, are you?"

"I!" said Ferreol, indignantly.

"And—more than an hour since you've eaten?"

"Three hours, precisely."

"You are not in a perspiration?"

"Dry as a fish-bone."

"And your health is good?"

"Sound as cast-iron."

"Nerves and temper calm and equable?"

"As an oyster at high water."

"Good. All as it should be. Hurry!" said he, "begin! undress yourself."

Ferreol up to this date had asked no one in marriage, but, sharp as he was, he never supposed that this act—important, it was true—would be accompanied by such formalities.

One of those, however, whom nothing amazed, he did not flinch, but proceeded to strip himself.

Decidedly obscure in this closet, Ferreol was reduced to conjectures, smell, and feeling; still, it was distinctly an under-vest, and other things, and shoes that the sailor drew from a locker and laid before him.

"With these," said he, "you can defy the perspiration."

"In truth I can!" said Ferreol, covering himself with the articles, which exhaled a singular odour of tar.

"Push each button of the pelerine into the corresponding hole of the collarette. Adjust the copper valves, and turn the screw-nuts. Close the latter till the joining of garments, pelerine, etc."

It was long, but Ferreol was patient, and said only:

"You are sure I shall find Monsieur Kenezek there?"

"Certain sure," responded the sailor, grinning; "he can't get away."

Presently they reached a jetty advancing into the bay. At the end of it the round crown of a building, from which, at a shout from his conductor, came running a second sailor, who placed himself without a word behind Ferreol's back.

"All ready?" said the first.

"All ready," responded Ferreol.

"You see the slate and the pencil hung to your side?" queried the other again.

"Slate and pencil both," assented Ferreol, amiably.

It was the last word he spoke.

Click! clack! rattle!

The helmet was over his head, bolted to his shoulders, the screw-nuts hard and fast.

At last a flash of enlightenment! Blinded, stifled, one single instant Nature rebelled against his principles. Too late, however, and protestations inopportune.

For now he felt himself lifted, carried a pace, suspended in space; then a strange sensation of cold mounting from feet to waist and from waist to shoulders.

He opened wide his eyes, and through the helmet's "peepers" saw a fish flit past him.

Preliminaries decidedly not commonplace!

He continued to descend with relative activity.

A monster advanced to meet him. It seized the slate and scratched upon it. Ferreol read, "I am Kenezek. Who are you?"

The moment was solemn. They must come to an understanding somehow. The situation had grown unique. "I am Ferreol," responded he on the slate. "Live at Paris. Income a thousand a year. Love Angele, your daughter, and have the honour to ask her hand in marriage."

"Marry her if you like. I——"

"Consent?"

"Consent? Yes. Good riddance, too. But quick, get off; I've work to finish."

Ferreol shot aloft.

"If I'd been you," said the sailor above, "I'd have waited ten minutes. Kenezek quits work, you know, every day at five o'clock."

Ferreol looked at his watch. Ten minutes to five.

"No," said he, "a man like me never waits a minute."

And he promptly returned to Paris.

To marry the charming Angele?

No. Fifty odd hours late in returning, the charming but impatient Angele had married the other fellow.

M. L.

My First Opium Smoke.

It was not many days after I had landed at Hong-Kong before a strong desire took possession of me to visit an opium den, and endeavour to verify for myself the truth of reports concerning the peculiar effects of that drug upon the nerves.

I accordingly accepted the proffered services of an honest-looking coolie, and, after haranguing with him in every language I knew, eked out with all the pantomimic gestures I could bring myself to perform, I knocked into his misshapen head my wants.

He officiously conducted me through the streets, and in a short time I found myself in a narrow, dirty-looking, evil-smelling thoroughfare, so narrow, in fact, that there seemed barely sufficient space for the passage of four persons walking abreast.

Presently my guide, signing me to follow him, unhesitatingly dived into the dark entry of a low, dilapidated, uninviting-looking building. I trod close at his heels—feeling rather nervous and uncomfortable, I confess—through a passage of uncertain length, and, on arriving at the end, a large curtain was drawn aside, and I was silently ushered into a spacious apartment, luxuriously furnished in the gorgeous Oriental style.

Motioning me to a vacant couch, my guide proceeded to obtain from one of the attendants the articles necessary for my experiments, and soon after returned bearing a small table, upon which was a pipe, with a thick, flute-like stem, but very small bowl, a lamp, and brass box. Opening the latter, he produced from it a small pill of the dark pasty drug, and inserted it into the pipe, which he ignited at the lamp. He gave one or two draws to insure its working, then, ostentatiously wiping the mouthpiece with his greasy sleeve, presented it to me with a grimace, no doubt meant for an encouraging smile.

I reclined back upon the couch, and inhaled, with as much indifference as I could assume, the pungent fumes of the stupefying preparation, experiencing the while the various sensations of the criminal on his way to execution.

Presently I felt a peculiar drowsiness stealing over me, against which I began to struggle at first, but by degrees it overpowered me. Gradually a haze, which every moment appeared to grow more dense, emanating from nowhere in particular, blotted out slowly the objects surrounding me, and I had a dim recollection of someone taking the pipe from my relaxing fingers.

For some time all was blank; but presently I found myself home once more and standing in the library. The only occupant was my father, who was seated at his desk writing rapidly, and although his eyes more than once wandered in my direction, he seemed unconscious of my presence.

I strenuously endeavoured to speak to him, but I could articulate no sound, nor could I stir from the spot where I was standing. I thought that I stood intently watching him until he presently threw aside the pen, and hurriedly folded and sealed the note he had been writing.

So vivid was my dream—so clearly and distinctly did every minute incident impress itself upon my mind, that I even remember noticing my father's hand tremble as he again took the pen to address the letter.

When he had done this he started from his chair, and began pacing nervously to and fro, as though labouring under some great perturbation, passing and repassing me so near that he almost touched me.

Suddenly he paused in his wild perambulations, and, advancing towards the mantelpiece, placed the letter, which he still held in his hand, above the mirror, and as he did so I noticed that it was directed to my mother. No sooner had he turned again, however, than the document slipped from the position in which he had placed it, and disappeared from view between the back of the glass and the wall.

I followed every movement of my father with the keenest interest, wondering what was to happen next.

He cautiously approached the door leading from the apartment, and listened attentively. Apparently satisfied, he next unlocked a drawer in his desk, and produced from it a small revolver (I remembered it well, for it was I who had purchased it for him a year previously as a safeguard against burglars), which he handled caressingly. He then sank into his chair with a deep sigh, and, gazing into vacancy, appeared to be deeply absorbed in thought. In that attitude he remained for some time.

It was not long before I comprehended my father's intent.

I saw him quickly raise the weapon which was in his hand, and press the muzzle to his temple.

Desparately I struggled to save my father from himself. I felt the veins in my forehead swell out like whipcords. With clenched teeth, madly I strove to overcome the influence which held me as with bands of steel.

He held the revolver for a few seconds rigidly to his head, then let it slowly fall again, as if he lacked the necessary courage to carry out his design.

Once more was the revolver raised. Once more did I struggle frantically. I saw my father clench his teeth as he nerved himself for the fatal act. I heard a sharp report, and, concentrating all my energy by a superhuman effort, gave utterance to a loud cry as I rushed forward to catch him ere he fell.

But all faded away, and instead of being in my father's library, I was once more in the Hong Kong opium den, my guide standing by my side.

"Cap'n notee hab nicee dream—bad," said that individual with a grin, as I gazed round vacantly for a moment.

Without deigning a reply to his jocose remark, I rewarded him for services rendered, and, wiping with trembling hands the clammy perspiration from my brow, hurried out into the open air.

It was the next day before I entirely recovered from the unpleasant effects of my first pipe of opium, but many weeks elapsed before the vision conjured up by it ceased to haunt my thoughts. Every detail seemed indelibly stamped upon my memory, and it left an impression which I found difficult to throw off. In fact, I even began to persuade myself that the incident had, indeed, been enacted in reality, and once yielded so far as to commence writing a letter home in order to set my mind at rest; but the next moment, fearing the ridicule which I knew the receipt of such a communication would evoke, I laughed over my superstitious weakness, and concluded at the same time that I was a fool.

* * * * *

Once more I stood on English soil. Nor did I regret it, for the wandering mode of existence I had been practising at length began to pall upon me.

The voyage across the Atlantic from New York was performed uneventfully, and on reaching Liverpool I dispatched a telegram to my people at Highgate, informing them at what time to expect me.

The train was on the point of departure as I entered the station, and I hurriedly jumped into a compartment as the whistle sounded.

The only occupant beside myself was a stout, middleaged individual, who was seated opposite me, seemingly absorbed in the *Daily News*, but I often caught him peering inquisitively at me over the top of the paper in a manner which seemed very familiar.

Presently he exclaimed with a chuckle, while he extended his hand:

"Bless my soul, Jack, don't you remember me? Glad to see you back again, my boy, safe and sound."

Immediately on hearing his voice, I recognised him as an old friend of my father, whom I often met at home.

"Mr. Tollervey," I answered, taking his proffered hand and shaking it cordially. "I thought your features were not unknown to me. You are the first to welcome me home after my long absence. Well, and the news. There must be quite a budget."

My travelling companion instantly assumed a grave demeanour, and favoured me with a peculiar look, the import of which I was at a loss to understand.

"My dear boy, you must prepare yourself for bad news."

I started and inquired rather anxiously:

"Has anything happened at home?"

"Your father," returned my companion, abruptly.

"What of him? Is he ill?" and a dreadful apprehension seized me.

"Worse," and Mr. Tollervey gazed from the window, as though something we were passing greatly interested him.

Soon he turned from it, and after a few moments' silence said:

"Your father is dead, and they say that he was murdered."

"Murdered!" I gasped; "and by whom?"

"Your brother was arrested for the crime, but I do not believe he did it," answered Mr. Tollervey, in a low voice.

I sank back upon the seat speechless and inert. Great Heavens! What a home-coming for me.

"There surely is a mistake somewhere," I presently said; "my brother cannot be guilty of such an act. Why has he not cleared himself?"

"Ah, he's in a bad fix," exclaimed my companion. "His version of the affair was that your father committed suicide."

"What!" I ejaculated, springing from my seat in amazement; "then it's the truth."

Not knowing the true cause of my emotion, Mr. Tollervey gently pushed me back into the seat, bidding me to compose myself.

"If you will listen," said he. "I will give you the facts of the case from beginning to end.

"It was about eight o'clock in the evening. The coachman was locking up the stable, when he was startled by hearing a pistol shot, the sound apparently proceeding from the library. A light was burning in that apartment, and running as quickly as possible up the walk he peered through the window. The blinds were not drawn, so he obtained a full view of the interior. Your father was leaning forward in his chair with an ugly wound in the temple, and life appeared extinct. Your brother was standing close behind him, his face very pale, holding in his hand a smoking revolver. The coachman immediately gave the alarm, and medical aid and the police were quickly summoned.

"The next morning your brother was arrested for murder. At his trial he swore that he was innocent, and asserted that as he was about to enter the library on the evening in question, he heard the report of firearms. Rushing within, he picked up the revolver, which he saw lying smoking upon the floor, and, as he did so, beheld the condition of his father, who was expiring in his chair. So great was the shock that he was for the moment rendered helpless, unable to act or to think, until the rest of the household appeared on the scene, having been alarmed by the coachman."

"Tell me the date upon which this happened?" I inquired, nervously.

After a moment's thought my fellow-traveller replied:

"Upon the 12th of October last."

Could it have been a coincidence? for upon that very day I had made my opium experiment, which consequently resulted in that horrible vision brought back again so fresh to my memory. At first I thought that possibly I was mistaken; but it was not so, for the entry in my diary destroyed all lingering doubts, and I vainly sought for an explanation of the mystery, for mystery it was.

Eventually the train steamed slowly into the station at which we were to alight, and there I parted with Mr. Tollervey.

Hailing a cab, I was speedily driven home, but my arrival was announced by no boisterous demonstration. That a cloud enveloped the house I saw at a glance upon entering, and although I was quietly received, at the same time my welcome was by no means a cool one.

My mother, who had been prostrated by the blow, was still confined to her room, so the only person with whom I could converse, and elicit the information I required, was my sister.

I learnt nothing of importance from her, however, more than I had already heard, save that my brother's trial had been adjourned until the next sessions, when he would be again arraigned before a special jury; so that I had not much time before me if I wished to do anything towards proving his innocence.

I rose next morning, after spending a sleepless night, and, before the rest of the household were stirring, proceeded to the apartment in which my father had met his death, an unaccountable fascination seeming to attract my footsteps thither.

Immediately upon entering, as my eyes encountered the familiar objects around me, I shuddered involuntarily as the vision of the suicide came more forcibly than ever to my mind.

Mechanically I crossed over to the spot where I thought I had stood whilst under the opium's mysterious influence, and once more in fancy witnessed my parent's strange proceedings.

There, in the same position, stood the desk, upon which he had written the letter, and opposite was the mirror, whereupon he had placed it after completion.

I instinctively glanced upwards, as though expecting to see the letter still there, but I suddenly remembered that it had disappeared from view between the mirror and the wall, as my father turned away.

My heart palpitated rapidly, as, acting in obedience to a sudden impulse, I started towards the mantelpiece and removed the mirror from its resting place.

The next moment it slipped from my nerveless fingers, and fell to the floor with a crash, for between it and the wall, discoloured by the dust, I caught sight of a letter, which, at the same moment, I saw was directed to my mother in my father's hand-writing.

For a time I was completely overcome by the discovery, and sank into a chair until I could regain possession of my faculties. At once I concluded that my vision in the opium den was, indeed, the truth, and I had been a witness of what actually had occurred, although so many miles away.

I placed the letter in my pocket, and wandered aimlessly about the place in feverish impatience, anxiously waiting for the moment to arrive when I could interview my mother in private, and at the same time I was burning with curiosity to know the contents of the strangely-discovered epistle.

After breakfast my mother summoned me to her room, and then in as few words as possible I related how the letter came into my possession, making it appear, however, that my finding it had been purely an accident.

With trembling hands she broke the seal, and, after reading, handed it back without uttering a word, although I noticed that her face was paler than before.

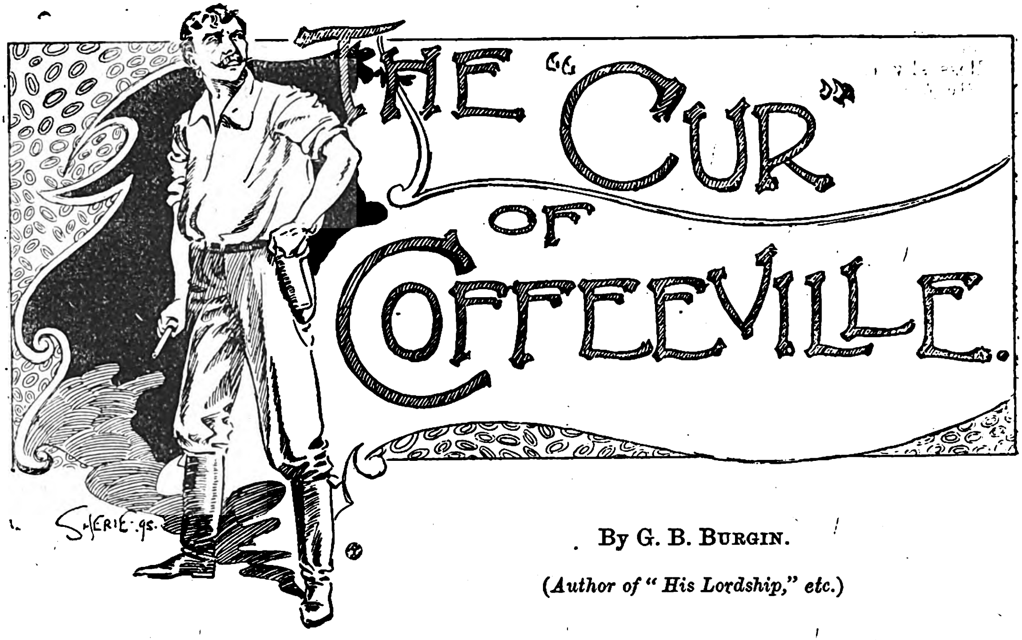
It seemed that my father had been labouring under the delusion that we were ruined, and accused himself of having beggared his family although at the time of his death his affairs seemed never in a more flourishing condition.

The letter ran on in this strain, and concluded by bidding farewell to all, adding that being unable to face the blow he had resolved to meet death rather than live the victim of self-recrimination.

The truth was now painfully apparent. That my father's mind had succumbed to the great strain of business anxieties was plain, for as I have before said, he had incurred no losses, but, on the contrary, had been very successful in his undertakings, so consequently he had committed suicide while temporarily insane.

Needless to say, the letter clearly established my brother's innocence, although by what means the finding of it was brought about I deem it best to hold a secret, and you are the first to whom I have imparted it.

W. H. W



THE "CUR" OF COFFEEVILLE.

By G. B. Burgin.

(Author of "His Lordship," etc.)

ANTONIO and Juanita sat within the dimly-lit room of the ranche, the gambler scowling sullenly, and the pretty vivacious Mexican girl very much in love with the handsome villain her husband, yet bored to death by the monotony of her surroundings. Even the thick adobe walls could not keep out the blistering heat. Antonio chafed at his enforced retirement from the cheating of *Gringos* (Yankees) in Coffeeville; Juanita pined for the delights of dancing and the gaming tables at which she acted as decoy. If only Antonio's temper were not so bad, they might have been plying their vocation merrily at this moment, and now—Piff! What great children men were with their tempers and jealousies and little barking pistols and sharp ugly knives to let the life-blood slip from out of one another with a few dexterous slits and slashes. Piff! But a girl must be careful how she flirted with a *Gringo*, or there was an end to everything. No more dancing or gaming, but only a flower-covered bier before the high altar, the swinging of incense by acolytes, the droning voice of the Padre reciting the prayers for the dead; and then a little hole in the ground where even the music of the *festa* failed to reach one. Piff! again; and she came back to the present with a sigh which did not tend to improve Antonio's temper.

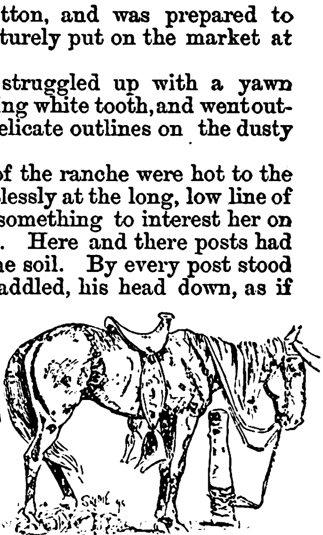
Juanita yawned, let one slipper lazily fall to the ground, and inhaled the smoke of her cigarette. "Mother of God!" she said, "but it is dull—and hot. Almost as hot, Antonio, as when you knifed the tenderfoot at Coffeeville, and had to run for the ranche."

Antonio Pinto, a tall, wiry, athletic scoundrel of great personal beauty, bent his black brows at pretty Juanita, as if she had recalled unpleasant associations. "Take care, light of my life," he murmured, "lest I treat you in the same way. You are overmuch given to the society of *Gringos*."

Juanita's cigarette fell after her slipper; she followed the cigarette, and lazily wound her way across the mud floor with slow, sinuous movements to the desperado who lay on a rude couch opposite. The girl threw her arms round Antonio and kissed him passionately. "Thou knowest, little lamb, that I should die if aught befel thee," she murmured, caressingly.

Antonio turned over and went to sleep again, one hand clasping a revolver, with the air of a lamb who knew his own value as mutton, and was prepared to defend it from being prematurely put on the market at all hazards.

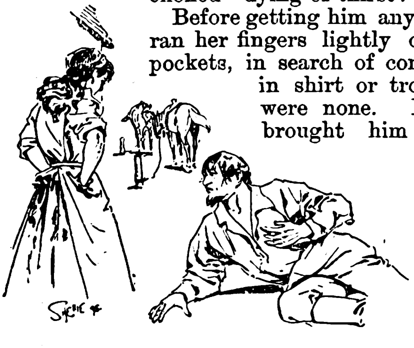
Thus repulsed, Juanita struggled up with a yawn which displayed every gleaming white tooth, and went outside, her bare feet leaving delicate outlines on the dusty floor.



Outside, the adobe walls of the ranche were hot to the touch. The girl looked listlessly at the long, low line of stables, vainly seeking for something to interest her on this dullest of all dull days. Here and there posts had been driven into the alkaline soil. By every post stood a dejected broncho, ready saddled, his head down, as if convinced that he had been tied to the post, and that it was useless to attempt to run away, even should there be an object attainable by running anywhere. The pitiless sun caught the copper-mounted pommels of the red leather saddles until they glowed again. All around it beat down on dusty alkaline plains, sparsely covered with sage brush. Not a tree was to be seen for miles; the level plain simply melted away into the horizon without a break or dip to vary its monotonous regularity. It was a sleepily languid world, in which even the insects were too drowsy to give one sign of life. Above, the cloudless sky, its vertical sun-rays streaming down with deadly force; around, the grey dust of the plains, the sombre adobe buildings, the death-like silence, the utter absence of animation in any living thing. No wonder that Juanita yawned, and wished again that Antonio would content himself with cheating *Gringos* in a gentlemanly fashion, and not knife them afterwards because they were foolish enough to object to the originality of his methods.

As Juanita stood in the doorway, a yellow, lean, hungry mongrel incautiously approached the nearest and sleepiest-looking broncho, which was apparently meditating on the abundance of spurs and riatas in general, and the scarcity of food in particular. A moment later a thin, yellow, howling streak of something canine disappeared in the direction of the stables, and the broncho languidly raised his head with an air which implied that if dogs would persist in running up against posts, accidents were bound to happen.

Juanita gazed at the sleepy bronchos, the panting dogs in the dust, the copper-coloured sky, and patches of sage bush with another sigh of disgust. Suddenly she noticed a little speck coming from the westward. "*Quc demonios!*" she muttered, anxiously sheltering her eyes with her hand. After the lapse of half an hour she could see that it was someone on foot, who limped wearily along, eyes cast upon the ground, as if seeking a crack therein to hide him from the perfervid sun. On nearing the ranche the man reeled in his walk. Juanita thought that he must be either tired or drunk, after the manner of the "Americanos" who have been "cleaned out" at the gambling saloons, stripped to the shirt, and then turned adrift to the tender mercies and fellowship of those other social and equally poverty-stricken outcasts, the coyotes. Once or twice he staggered despairingly, and shook his clenched fist at the sky. When near the low adobe walls of the ranche the fellow halted doubtfully, crept forward to the sheltering doorway, and fell in a heap at Juanita's feet. "Water, water!" he cried, hoarsely; "I'm parched—choked—dying of thirst!"



Before getting him any water, the girl ran her fingers lightly over the man's pockets, in search of concealed weapons in shirt or trousers. There were none. Reassured, she brought him a well-filled gourd, and laughed to see the poor fellow gulp it down. When the gourd was empty, she fetched a bucket filled with the sparkling treasure, and dashed some of it over his shoeless feet. "Cleaned out, eh?" she asked, hands on hips, as she leant against the doorway.

As the stranger crawled towards the bucket, here and there a bronzed patch of skin showed faintly through the grey alkali dust, which also streaked his hair, and hung in powdery bags beneath his eyes. The individual who plunged his head into the bucket might have been fifty; the face which emerged from it was that of a man of three or four-and-twenty, worn and thin, but resolutely handsome.

The girl motioned him to continue his way; but the stranger only shook his head, with a muttered "*Manana, manana* (by-and-bye); I guess it don't matter whether I die here or out in the sun," he said, despairingly. "It's cooler here, that's the only difference."

The girl looked at him significantly. "*Madre de Dios*, you won't find a bullet very cooling; and it's quicker."

"Yes," said the man, slowly; "it's quicker; that's all you can say for it, I reckon."

"*Quien sabe?*" doubtfully retorted Juanita.

"Well, get it over and finish me." He threw open the breast of his shirt, crawled outside, as if out of consideration for people who might object to a corpse in their house, and propped himself up against the wall.

"*Que lestina!*" (What a pity!) cried Juanita. "Why should I want to kill you?" Her velvety eyes rested upon his lean, handsome face for a moment. "*Bienvenido.* What use is a dead *Gringo* to anyone? He can't dance, or play the guitar, or," she whispered, "make love."

The man was about to answer, when, with a stealthy cat-like tread, Antonio emerged from the ranche, his pistol ready cocked. "What's all this?" he asked, suspiciously, covering the tramp with his weapon.

The girl shrugged her shoulders indifferently, and turned away with a softly uttered "*Adios*" to the stranger. "Your successor at the saloon does his work well," she said. "The man is almost naked. He wants to be shot."

Antonio raised the pistol. "Where?"

"Heart's the best place," the tramp rejoined, indifferently. "Get it over, and fling me to the coyotes."

Antonio hesitated. His hands were already red with blood. "Bah," he said; "who's to bury you! Will you eat my bread? If so, *bueno*."

"I don't seem to have much of an appetite for anyone's bread," answered the tramp, reluctantly. "It's the worst jag I've ever been on." He rubbed his head in a puzzled way.

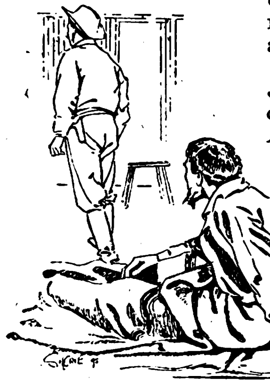
"Like a big ball of fire?" asked Antonio, enviously. During his term of office at the saloon he had never plucked his pigeons so thoroughly as this one appeared to be stripped. "Get up," he said. "Juanita, find him something for his feet. If there is anything wrong, we can settle it afterwards." He tapped the revolver significantly with one brown, thin finger, leisurely rolled a fresh cigarette, and went inside the ranche. The woman followed him. She knew how well that little revolver carried.

Thus left to himself, the tramp curled up inside the door, and fell asleep. When he awoke it was dusk—a cool, lovely dusk, in which the moving figures of people outside assumed gigantic proportions. The night was filled with the odorous breath of distant flowers wafted from the city across the barren plains by the grateful breeze. One or two peons lounged about the fire, clad in huge hats and striped blankets, for after the fierce heat of the day, the air was chilly. One by one the stars began to creep over the darkened plain; there was a savoury smell of cooking outside struggling with and alternately overcoming and being overcome by the breath of the night-breeze. As the stranger sat up and began to realise where he was, Juanita passed through the doorway and joined Antonio in the eating of some savoury mess seasoned with red peppers. When they had finished, Antonio beckoned to the tramp. "Eat of my dish, then you are my man and no cur. If you ever disobey me, I'll blow out your cursed *Gringo* brains."

He waved his arm in all directions, as if emphasising the distribution of his new retainer's brains. That worthy followed the movement with a grin. "They'd not go so far as that," he said; and ravenously began to eat, the Mexican never relaxing his vigilance for a single second, although, when the meal was over, he tossed the tramp a packet of cigarettes, and lit one of them at his own for the newcomer.

In the middle of the night, the tramp felt someone bending over him. Long, light fingers dexterously searched his shirt and trouser pockets. It was only the Mexican making sure that Juanita had done her work thoroughly. "'Twould be safer to blow out his brains," said Antonio, rising reluctantly, his eyes gleaming in the moonlight. "Bah, this poor devil who calls himself 'Smeeth,' has eaten my bread and may be useful."

As he moved away the tramp sat up. Even in the moonlight his grin was expansive and wide. "That's a close call," he muttered, surveying Antonio's retreating form. "It's getting cold." Then he unconcernedly drew Antonio's old blanket round him and went to sleep again.



In a month "Smeeth," as Juanita called him, had become a member of the family. Antonio paid him three dollars a week to make himself generally useful, and then, with the indifference of his race, awaited the course of events. At times, when the society of Juanita palled upon him, Antonio played cards with "Smeeth" and Juanita's brother, "Smeeth" stipulating beforehand, that, as he was an inexperienced Englishman, who had already been plundered of every farthing he possessed, he was not to pay up if luck went against him. Events showed the prudence of this arrangement, for Antonio always won. "Smeeth's" only consolation under his defeat was to obtain permission once a week to go into Coffeeville to buy whiskey. As he was naturally generous, and never drank it all himself, Antonio always gave him permission to go. "Smeeth" generally returned with the news that the feeling against Antonio (he had knifed two men who had the impertinence to accuse him of having cheated—an accusation which was strictly true) was stronger than ever, and industriously fomented by the new holder of the saloon in the hope of keeping Antonio permanently away from such a promising district. Antonio's language when he heard of this iniquitous proceeding was not pleasant; it required all Juanita's tact to prevent him from throwing himself into the saddle and making a wild rush through the town, revolver in hand. She pointed out that even if he were not killed, such a proceeding would infallibly induce every inhabitant of Coffeeville to attack the ranche, armed to the teeth, whilst now, such was the terror inspired by his marvellous strength and accuracy as a marksman, not one of the Yankee dogs dare come within a mile of the place. Soon the whole affair would blow over; Antonio could make some votive offerings at the next *festa*, and shortly after resume his honourable and gentlemanly calling. Whereupon Antonio grunted a surly assent, and searched "Smeeth's" pockets with renewed vigilance. He had every confidence in that worthy, but still it was just as well to be careful. The reward set upon his (Antonio's) head was a very large one, and "Smeeth" seemed to be a poor man to whom this amount represented opulence and unlimited whiskey.

When Antonio went away after this proceeding, "Smeeth's" blood was up, although he had snored through the ordeal in his customary ingenuous manner. "I guess I've had enough of this," he said. "It's about time I put an end to it. If I don't he'll end me. I'm afraid, too, of the way that black-eyed girl looks at me, wanting to know if England ain't a beautiful place to live in. It may be comfortable enough for some people to live there, but 'tain't altogether healthy for me, when I'm no more an Englishman than she is, but only a *Gringo*."

The vision of Juanita, cigarette in mouth, riding through a quiet English lane upset "Smeeth's" gravity altogether, and he laughed until Antonio suspiciously returned to see what was the matter.

"Had a bad dream," said "Smeeth," humbly. "Seemed to fancy someone was tickling me. Warn't it funny, Boss?'

Antonio showed his long knife significantly. "Señor Smeeth, it is this which does not make people laugh when it tickles," he said, gravely.

"Oh, no, 'twasn't like that," said "Smeeth." "Seemed more as if someone was feeling in my pockets. I've dreamed that most nights lately."

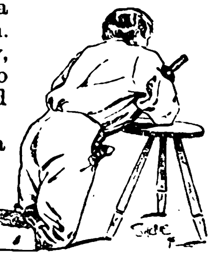
Antonio pretended not to hear, and was striding away when "Smeeth" preferred a humble petition that he might spend the next day in Coffeeville, on the ground that he was dying for whiskey and must have it.

When Antonio had gone back to bed again, "Smeeth" hastily dug a hole in the floor, put a piece of board over the cavity, replaced the earth, and resumed his interrupted slumbers.

He was afoot early the next morning, and departed gaily after a cautious flirtation with Juanita, who, tired of the seclusion of the ranche, pined for the Coffeeville dancing saloons. When he returned late in the afternoon he was in a very hilarious mood indeed. He hurriedly stumbled into his little room, and came out again to see if anyone had noticed his return. "It is plain that the Señor has all he can carry," said Juanita, meeting him on the threshold of the ranche.

"Smeeth" looked at her with drink-sodden eyes, and reeled by again into the little room allotted to his use. When Juanita peeped in she found him bending down in the corner hastily patting the ground. She laughed and thought it very funny. Juanita was accustomed to drunken men. "If you have finished the whiskey, I would not be you when Antonio awakes from his siesta," she said significantly.

"Smeeth" turned to her with a foolish smile. "It'sh or right," he said, thickly. "Jusalittle bit happy; thatsh all. It'sh or right," and he staggered to his feet.



Antonio's voice was heard calling for "the cursed English pig."

"Pig'sh c—c—comin' with his swi—will," said "Smeeth," lurching forward with a jug of whiskey. "Wheresh y'r br—ruther?"

"Guarding the passage," replied Juanita. "When he sleeps, Antonio watches for the *Gringos*."

"Smeeth" lurched forward into the room, nearly spilling the whiskey in his drunken haste. Antonio snatched the jug away, kicked him into a corner, and drank deeply. "Smeeth" poured a little of the whiskey into a tumbler for Juanita, who sipped it daintily. From time to time the man in the passage, whose duty it was to prevent the revellers from being surprised, put his head in at the door and smelt the odour of the whiskey with dilated nostril. Presently, Antonio's head fell forward on his breast; he slid back with a snore. Juanita also begun to snore, more musically than Antonio, but, for all that, an undisguised snore.

"Smeeth" slipped a pair of handcuffs out of his pocket, clicked them over Antonio's huge wrists, and doubtfully surveyed the doorway. "It's my turn to search now," he said, with a grin, and took away Antonio's weapons. His next step was to go into the passage, and put a pistol to the head of Juanita's brother, who leant against the wall rolling a cigarette. In less time than it takes to relate, that worthy was weaponless and handcuffed also. "Smeeth's" recovery from his drunken fit seemed miraculous in its celerity.

"Now," said "Smeeth," "I ain't agoin' to hurt you as long as you keep quiet. March into that room, and sit down on your bed."

Juanita's brother got up with a scowl, walked meekly into the room, and swore softly as "Smeeth" turned the key on him.

It took "Smeeth" an hour to get his captive into a Mexican cart. "I'm most afraid I drugged that whiskey too much," he murmured, as he drove quietly into Coffeeville, drew up before a certain building, and gave a low whistle.

The cart was immediately surrounded by half-a-dozen American detectives. "What's the use of bringing in a body?" growled one, who seemed to be in authority. "I knew you'd never get him alive."

"Throw a bucket of water over him," said "Smeeth," quietly; "but don't take the bracelets off, whatever you do."

Antonio was dragged out of the cart, soused with a bucket of water, and half-led, half-carried into the house. It was some minutes before he sat up and realised that he had been trapped by a detective for the sake of "blood-money." His lowering eyes roamed restlessly round the room, looking for his betrayer, but "Smeeth" unostentatiously kept in the background. When he saw that the recognition could no longer be delayed he stepped forward, and the two men looked each other in the face.

"*Caramba!* You Coffeeville cur!" hissed Antonio, straining at the fetters which fastened his wrists. "And I gave you bread!"

The handcuffs did not yield to the enormous strain put upon them. "Take them off for three minutes. Mother of God, only three minutes," Antonio implored the chief of the detectives. "Then you can do as you please with me."

"Smeeth" nodded to his Chief. "That's fair; I caught him by a dirty trick. There's a wall round the courtyard and a door each side. Give him a revolver and put him one side; I'll come in at the other. If he plugs me, you're to let him go; then it's all fair and square."

"I don't hold with this foolishness," said the Chief, irresolutely.

"I've eaten his bread," said "Smeeth," *alias* Billy Wentworth, the celebrated detective. "It's a dirty trick I played him, and I'll take my chances."

Antonio's eyes lighted up. "*Vamos*, that is better," he said, bowing courteously to the detective. "Only three minutes; that is all I ask."

"A good deal can be done in three minutes," said "Smeeth," drily, handing a loaded revolver to Antonio, and turning his back upon him with the utmost coolness. "Give him a drink, boys. If he plugs me he's to have a day's start." He turned round again and looked Antonio full in the face as if in response to the other's mute questioning. "Oh, I'll look after her! She was drugged, too."

Antonio took the whiskey handed to him. "Smeeth" did the same.

"To our meeting in the next world, Señor," cried Antonio.

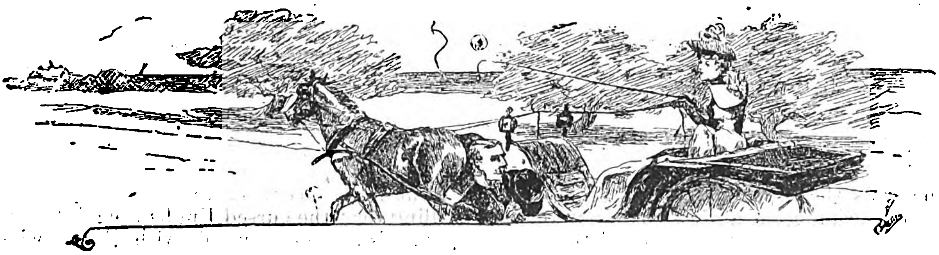
"Amen!" said "Smeeth," flinging his tumbler to the ground, and following Antonio into the cool, open air.

The two men entered the courtyard from opposite sides. In a few seconds their revolvers began to sound with short, sharp, whiplike cracks. Then all was silent.

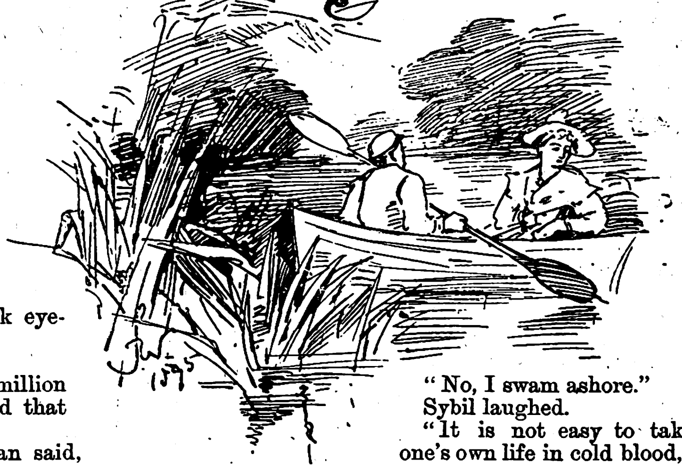
"We'd better go in now, boys," said the Chief, nervously. "He's downed Billy for sure."

They went in—at a run. Antonio lay flat on the ground riddled with bullets. "Smeeth" sat somewhat languidly propped up against the wall, with a wound in his shoulder. The chief regarded him reproachfully. "Plugged by a Mexican!" he said, in sorrowing tones. "Billy, I didn't think it of you."

"Smeeth" grinned apologetically. "I'd eaten his bread," he said; "that sort of stuck in my throat, so I let him fire first. I wasn't going to be shamed by a low-down greaser, not much" and he fainted.



WORTHY O' WOMAN!



“IF you ask me,” the girl was saying, as the canoe glided down beneath the grey-leaved willows, “I think the man who would commit suicide for a woman can have had very little to do with the other sex.”

Percy Wallace drew his paddle out of the water and laid it across his knees, raising his dark eyebrows interrogatively.

“Why?” he inquired.

“Because not one in a million is worth the sacrifice, and that one only by comparison.”

“Nevertheless,” the man said, “you can hardly take up a paper without finding the report of a suicide for which the only motive is a love affair.”

Sybil St. Croix gave a little contemptuous shrug of her pretty shoulders.

“Love has got a bad name, like Monte Carlo,” she said, smiling across the boat at her companion, “and like Monte Carlo it is made the scapegoat for a great deal of iniquity with which it has nothing to do whatever. The world, after all, is blind. It blames the last straw for breaking the camel's back. No man, whose mind was not already unhinged, would ever blow out his brains for a woman, unless, as I said just now, he knew nothing about the sex. There may be a few who are worth waiting for, but none who are worth dying for—none;” and the girl leant back among the luxurious pile of cushions in the bow and laughed.

A rippling breeze had turned the nose of the canoe and driven the little craft ashore among the flat green blades of the waterflags that rustled together by the riverside. The man pushed off mechanically, and they drifted on again between the steep green banks and sloping meadows where the cattle stood knee-deep among a golden crop of marigolds. It was growing late, and the last lingering gleam of sunshine had faded from the fleecy clouds that floated here and there in the pale blue expanse of sky. A light mist was rising from the river, and the early summer heat had given way to the freshness of the evening atmosphere.

“You may be right—or partly right,” Wallace said, at last, taking a few lazy strokes with the paddle and resting again; “but, for all that, exactly two years ago to-day I tried to drown myself for no other reason in the world than because a woman, a mere slip of a girl, thought it amusing or clever to deceive me.”

Sybil leant forward.

“Did you, Percy,” she exclaimed, incredulously. “Tell me?”

“There is nothing to tell.”

“But what happened?”

“Nothing. That's the ignominious part about it.”

“Did you sink?”

“No, I swam ashore.”

Sybil laughed.

“It is not easy to take one's own life in cold blood,” she said.

“And still less in cold water.”

“For which, I suppose, you are duly thankful—now that you have had time to think the matter over?”

Percy Wallace shrugged his broad shoulders.

“I have never been able to make up my mind,” he answered, sadly.

“Then I will make it up for you. Love is fiction—and only fact if you choose to make it so. In another twelve months you will have forgotten all about this girl.”

The man shook his head.

“You would not say that if you have ever known what it was to be in love yourself,” he answered. “I can never adore anyone again as I worshipped Miss Edmunds. Never!”

“Rubbish!” the girl interposed. “Someone else will take her place before long—someone who is a great deal more worthy of your affections than she was.”

They had reached the landing-stage by this time, and Wallace helped the girl to disembark, and fastened the painter before he said, half lightly, half in serious mood:

“Do you imagine, Sybil, that a man who has ever really loved could love again?”

“Twice,” mockingly. “A hundred times! Not in the same way, perhaps, but with equal fervour. Percy, I honestly think that you ought to cease moping for this girl, whom you only cared for as long as you did not know what her true character was. You are making yourself miserable for nothing.”

“You don't understand,” the man said. “It would not be fair for me to ask any girl to be my wife when I know all the time that I love another better. Love her, although I know she deserves only to be despised and hated, and although I believe and hope for my peace of mind that I shall never set eyes on her again.”

Nevertheless, Sybil St. Croix's words had made an impression on Wallace. He thought of them again on his way up to town that night, and he was still thinking the matter over when he reached his rooms in Jermyn Street a few hours later and found a note waiting for him on the table. The handwriting was not altogether unfamiliar, and he tore open the envelope with some degree of interest.

"Dear Mr. Wallace," it ran, "just a line to say we have arrived at the Grand Hotel, and that I hope to see you very soon. Are you engaged for lunch to-morrow? If not, I shall be delighted if you care to come round,—Most sincerely yours, Olive Norton."

Wallace read the letter through twice and then put it down with a smile. It was distinctly gratifying that this girl should remember a promise made six months before, to write and let him know whenever she came to London. They had met at a country house during the winter, and seen a good deal of each other. So much so, indeed, that embarrassing rumours had flown round about a pending engagement. They recurred to Wallace, and possibly it was the recollection of Sybil's remarks that afternoon that made them appear less ridiculous than they had at the time. Now he came to consider the matter he could not see what there was ridiculous about such an idea at all. Perhaps the girl really cared for him. He had never thought of this contingency seriously before. He pulled a long face at the notion, and began pacing up and down the room.

Six months before, if anyone had asked him why he was not in love with Olive Norton he might have given two answers, both of which would have been equally true. He could have said that his affections were set elsewhere, and added, had he felt in the humour, set at nought, or he might merely have answered that so many men were, or pretended to be, in that felicitous state, that he did not care to join the herd.

Now, however, Wallace—setting forth the pros and cons of the matter with careful impartiality—decided that Sybil's view of his own position was the only sensible one to take. That Miss Norton cared for him was at least a reasonable supposition, and of his own feelings towards her he entertained no manner of doubt. He liked the girl and admired her and enjoyed her friendship.

The following day he went round to the hotel for lunch. Miss Norton's reception was certainly flattering, coming from an attractive girl, a girl whom he knew as an absolute fact had been proposed to by several of the most run-after men in London. It had never occurred to him before how absolutely pretty she was, and, charmed by her vivacious manner, and her evident appreciation of his attentions, he promptly proceeded to press his suit, thinking, as all wise men think, that there is no time like the present for making a good impression.

Lunch finished, they drove together to the park.

"I am afraid that it is too early for the fashionable world to be here," observed Wallace, as they alighted from their hansom, and turned together down the long shady avenue beside the Row.

"So much the better. Let us sit down here, away from everybody, and talk."

They selected two chairs in a long empty line against the railings, and sat there undisturbed by the sight of a single human being, save one solitary equestrian who was cantering slowly up and down in the sun.

Wallace was rapidly making up his mind to bring things to an issue. He could see from the girl's manner that she was in love with him, and now and then when she turned and said something, and their eyes met, he felt a thrill run through him which gave him exquisite pleasure. There was a gratifying sense of superiority, too, in having won this girl, when he had watched others try and fail and go away defeated.

Olive Norton was leaning back in her chair, her hands clasped behind her head, her eyes fixed on a bright bed of flowers across the road, supremely happy and contented. She was smiling a little, showing a pretty set of teeth, and an unusual depth of colour heightened the beauty of her face.

"How is Sybil St Criox?" she asked, suddenly.

Percy Wallace looked surprised.

"Quite well, I believe. I have just come back, from their place. But why do you ask like that?" and he turned round a little and gave his companion a quick, furtive glance.

"Because I am told you admire her so."

"Who told you?"

"I don't know. Everyone says so."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"We are the best of friends," he said, speaking, in a low, lazy voice.

"Friends are people whom we like too much to love?"

"Perhaps——. But it is utterly untrue that Sybil St. Croix is anything to me, in the way you mean. We tell each other everything. Confidence is not the beginning of love. I only adore one person in the world—and that is you."

He did not change his voice or his position; but the little green spider he was chivying with his stick escaped and he did not notice it.

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that," the girl exclaimed, "I like you much best when you are serious."

"I am serious. I mean every word that I say. Olive, I love you."

The girl's heart was beating fast. A hot wave of colour rushed to her face. "I don't believe you," she said a little breathlessly. "You wouldn't say it like that if you did."

Wallace looked up and down. He was anxious not to make himself ridiculous. No one, however, was in sight. He turned quickly and caught her in his arms, kissing her three times before he let her go.

The moment the girl escaped she sprang to her feet hot and flushed, catching her underlip with her teeth.

"I never said that you might kiss me," she panted.

Wallace captured her hand and drew her back to her seat.

"Don't talk nonsense," he said. "If the man may not kiss the girl he is going to marry ——"

"Who said I was going to marry you, sir?"

"You must, now you have allowed me to kiss you here;" and satisfied with this delightful form of argument he released her hand and sat looking at her with love-filled eyes. Sybil St. Croix was certainly right. There was not an atom of doubt about that. So he thought and wondered at his own inconsistency before the day was out.

There was silence for some time and then the girl said:

"Am I the first women you have ever loved well enough to speak to as you have spoken to me, Percy?"

"There was one other," Wallace admitted, truthfully, "but I never asked her to marry me. Thank heaven I found out in time what manner of girl she was."

"Perhaps she would have said 'No,' if you had asked her."

"Probably. I know now that she liked someone else better. But you never can tell."

"I want to hear about her, Percy. I am jealous already."

"It is an old story now," he said, passing his hand over his face and sighing a little. "Three years ago I was wintering at Cannes, and there I met this girl who was travelling alone with her mother. I saw a good deal of her, as people do when they are thrown together in a place like that. Sometimes I would be round at their hotel three or four times a day. We walked together and drove together, and went excursions up the olive-clad ravines.

"From the first evening we spent in one another's company, strolling about the luxuriant gardens in the soft moonlight, I knew that I and my fate had met, and each day I grew fonder of the girl, and by every token she returned my affections. When I was away from her I was miserable until we met again, and she used to tell me that she had counted the hours of my absence.

"Well, when a girl says things like that to you, and apparently means them, you naturally begin to regard her as your special property. About three weeks after we were first introduced I happened to be strolling along the promenade one day at dusk by the side of the picturesque little harbour filled with shipping from which many gay streams of colour were waving gently in the wind. No one except a few peasants and sailors were in sight. I lighted a cigar and sat down.

"Presently my attention was attracted by a little boat which put off from one of the yachts, and was pulled rapidly towards the landing-stage. Thinking the owner would probably be on board, I moved down with some curiosity in that direction, keeping, however, on the further side of the road. As the boat neared the shore I saw that there were two passengers on board—a man and a girl, whose back was turned towards me.

"The man was short and squarely built, with a sallow complexion and a small black beard. For some reason or other the face seemed repulsive to me. He was bending forward and speaking eagerly to the girl, and just before the landing-stage was reached he seized her hand and tried to kiss her. From where I stood it seemed to me that the girl resisted for a minute and then gave way, and the man's arm was still round her waist as the little wooden pier was reached. They got out together, and as she stepped ashore the woman's face was turned towards me for an instant."

Wallace stopped for a minute, coughing a little, and Miss Norton bent forward, laying her hand on his arm.

"Go on," she said.

"I recognised her in a moment," the man continued, speaking in a low, vibrating voice. "It was Miss Edmunds. . . . . . Just for a second I felt sick and helpless, and then a sort of boiling rage came over me, and in my anger I called her all sorts of horrible names. If Heaven had placed a knife in my hands I could have killed her—or myself.

"The two stood together, conversing in low tones. The girl was gesticulating a little; the man's hands were in his pocket, and he was frowning while he listened, and now and then stamped restlessly on the ground. What could it mean? Surely such a man as that could not be attractive. I compared him with myself, and laughed.

"Then I thought of his yacht, and my thoughts had no sooner taken this direction than I began to understand. The owner must be a man of enormous wealth—a millionaire, perhaps. People may say what they like, but there is nothing which money cannot buy—nothing. My heart was beating, my legs trembling. Perhaps it was the sound of my footfall on the gravel which made Miss Edmunds look round. The light fell full on her white face, and I saw that she was crying.

"The sight was more than I could stand in the state of mind I was then in. The moment her back was turned I crept nearer, hardly knowing what was in my heart to do. But before I had time to act, before I had time to think, there was the soft rustle of a lady's skirt behind me, a tall figure brushed by, and stopped as if suddenly transformed to stone in the middle of the roadway.

"At the sight of this apparition I shrunk back into the shadow of the trees, but from where I stood I recognised at once in the new-comer—Mrs. Edmunds. Apparently the man I had been watching recognised her too, for no sooner had she appeared than he turned on his heel without a word or a sign to the girl, and, springing into the boat, was rowed rapidly away across the harbour.

"The two women passed close by me. Mrs. Edmunds was strangely agitated, and I could see that the younger one's face, although wet with tears, was proud and defiant under the other's reproaches. Angry as I was, I felt sorry for her. In spite of what I had seen I could not bring myself to believe that anyone could come between her and me. A scrap of the conversation reached me as the two women disappeared.

"'We must leave Cannes at once,' the mother was saying in a bitter ringing voice, which sounded inexpressibly sad. 'Oh! why does that man haunt us. Promise me, Gertrude, that you will never speak to him again—never. Promise me, darling.'

"The girl's answer was inaudible.

"So they were going away. I threw myself down on a seat, and buried my face in my hands.

"Nearly an hour must have passed when I got up with a shiver, and, buttoning my coat, set off at a brisk pace for my hotel. I had made up my mind then what I would do. That evening I would see Miss Edmunds, and ask her to be my wife. But when the time came I found it impossible to get her alone to myself. It was not her doing. I could see that she was chafing under her mother's vigilant watchfulness as much as I was. At last I had to go. She followed me into the corridor. Her look, her manner, everything set my pulses on fire.

"'I must tell you,' she said; 'we're going away to-morrow night.'

"'Why?' I asked. I watched her face closely, breathlessly. She did not change colour, her eyes met mine fearlessly as ever, only the corners of her mouth dropped a little."

Percy Wallace stopped in his narration. The Park attendant was demanding payment for the chairs. He received the tickets mechanically, and then turned to his companion.

"I don't know why I should weary you with this lengthy recitation," he observed. "Suppose we talk of something else. You are finding the heat too much?" for Olive Norton's face had suddenly turned deathly white.

"No, no," she said, quickly; "go on. I want to hear. You told her that you loved her—?"

Wallace nodded.

"And she said that you were more to her than anyone else in the world?"

Again the man assented.

"And then—"

"Mrs. Edmunds came up behind. I went at once. It was no use stopping longer. When I was back in my rooms again, I sat down and wrote her a brief note, asking her to drive with me the following morning, as we might not see each other again for some time. It was nearly eleven when I received her reply. 'I am extremely sorry,' her letter said, 'but I have to lunch with a relation. Can you come round in the evening before we go?'

"I knew Miss Edmunds too well, or thought that I did, to suspect for a moment that this was merely an excuse to avoid a *tête-à-tête*. Her sweet admission of affection for me had disarmed even the suspicions which the scene I had witnessed had aroused. The man perhaps had influence over her, but that there was any love lost between them, I could not and would not believe. I had no cause to fear a rival, and disappointed as I was for the moment, I was thoroughly contented and happy.

"For want of something better to do, I went over to Nice by rail, and guided by some miserable instinct turned into the London House for *déjeuner*. *Sitting at a little table together near the window were Miss Edmunds and the stranger.* That I tell you frankly was the most miserable moment of my life. She looked up, caught my eye, and half rose from the table with a piteous gesture.

"I went across the room towards her, outwardly calm, but a raging fire within.

"'Your relation, I suppose, has not turned up,' I said, and with that I swung round on my heel and left the room. I heard the man utter an angry oath and spring to his feet, but I did not wait or turn. I loved the girl too much to create a scene there. Yet I was mad with jealousy and hate, and every other passion. Possible it was no longer to deceive myself into believing that this girl, whom I loved with such insane intensity, was not in love with this dark-browed stranger. Nothing short of love would have led her to compromise herself in the way she had done with him; to deceive me; to ignore her mother's entreaties and to disobey her commands.

"From that day to this I have never set eyes on her again. I have told you everything. Let us talk about some more interesting topic—about ourselves—about my love for you."

Wallace rose as he spoke, quitting his seat in that automatic way which implies an absent mind and preoccupied attention. Miss Norton followed his example.

"I would like to ask you one question," she said, with slight embarrassment and in a halting tone: "Do you still love this girl?—perhaps I have no right to expect—"

"You have every right," he interposed, quickly. "But I find it impossible to analyse my feelings. Nothing can ever justify her treatment of me. She is unworthy either of affection or admiration—that at least I know."

His companion did not answer at once. Had he glanced in her direction he would have been terrified at the piteous expression on her face; but he did not look up, he did not even raise his eyes from the ground.

"Suppose," she said abruptly—and her voice was low and tremulous—"suppose that you were to discover, that you had judged Miss Edmunds wrongly—what then?"

The man frowned.

"I do not care to consider such a ridiculous hypothesis," he said, with some warmth. "It is hardly a fair question. Surely you can believe me, you can trust me, when I say that you are all in all to me, now."

A bright, radiant look came into the girl's face, and for a moment the sanguine and delightful reveries in which she had indulged earlier in the afternoon returned with their soft enchantment, and thrilled her with passionate delight. Then the heavenly light faded, the rapt look gave place to one of melancholy.

"Listen!" she said, touchingly; "I have no right to keep back the truth from you—I know Miss Edmunds; she is my best and dearest friend."

The man started.

"How strange," he murmured, half to himself. "I suppose she is married by this time to her wealthy friend. I wish him joy."

"She is not married!"

"Ah!"

A moment's silence, and then Wallace said:

"Why, I wonder," musingly.

"Because the one man she cared for threw her over and broke her heart."

"A just punishment. Who was the man?"

"*You!*"

"But at least I cannot be held in blame. The stranger——"

"Was her father."

Wallace was about to interrupt, but Miss Norton silenced him with an imperious gesture. "He was divorced from his wife," she went on, struggling manfully against a choking sensation in her throat, which rose up and thrilled her, "and separated from his daughter, whom he loved passionately—devotedly. I need hardly explain more."

The man was trembling from head to foot.

"Cruel, cruel!" he muttered to himself. "How could I have thought so badly of her—ah!" and he turned away with a long indrawn breath of pain. The next instant he laid his hand on his companion's arm.

"What you have told me," he said, tenderly, "must make no difference between you and me."

"That cannot be. In justice to you and to my friend—from my love for you both—I must release you. I am going to call on Miss Edmunds now. Will you come with me?"

Like one in a dream, the man followed her as she stopped a passing hansom and entered. They reached the house and went up the broad stairs together.

Outside the door Miss Norton stopped. Her face was white and, in spite of herself, her lips trembled.

"You go first," she said, and pushed him forward gently. Wallace heard the door close behind him. He turned quickly. Miss Norton had remained outside.

Slowly she descended again into the hall. "Ten minutes," she murmured to herself—"the shortest engagement there has ever been—yet I am content to know that he has loved me."

And Wallace was left alone with Miss Edmunds.

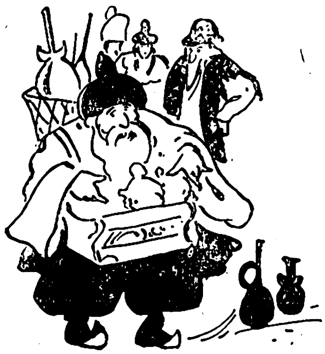
W. A. W.

The Transformed Caliph.

ONCE upon a time, the Caliph Chasid, of Bagdad, on a lovely afternoon, sat comfortably upon his sofa. He had slept a little and appeared cheerful after his slumber. He smoked a long pipe, drank now and then a little coffee, which a slave poured out, and, as if it tasted good, stroked his beard in a pleased way. In short, one perceived from his appearance that he felt in a good humour.

At this hour one could easily have speech with him, because he was then always mild and amiable; and at this time also his Grand Vizier paid his respects. This particular afternoon he came as usual, but appeared very thoughtful, which was not his usual custom. The Caliph took the pipe partially out of his mouth, and spoke: "What makes you wear so thoughtful an expression, Grand Vizier?"

The Grand Vizier flung his arms crosswise over his heart, bowed himself before his master, and spoke: "Sir! whether I wear a thoughtful expression I know not, but there stands yonder at the castle a peddler who has such pretty things that it angers me that I have not more superfluous gold."



The Caliph, who for some past time would willingly have given pleasure to his Grand Vizier, sent his black slave to fetch the peddler. This was a little stout man, swarthy in appearance, and in ragged dress. He carried a chest in which he had all kinds of wares—pearls and rings, richly inlaid pistols, goblets, and combs.

The Caliph and his Vizier examined everything, and the Caliph finally bought for himself and Mansor beautiful pistols, but for the wife of the Vizier a comb. As the peddler was closing his chest the Caliph saw a little drawer, and asked if there were wares in it. The peddler drew out the drawer, and showed therein a box containing a blackish powder, and a paper with singular writing, which neither the Caliph nor Mansor could read.

"Some time ago I took these two pieces from a merchant who had found them in a street in Mecca," said the peddler; "they are at your service at a low price. I cannot accomplish anything with them."

The Caliph, who would gladly have an old manuscript in his library, even though he could not read it, bought the manuscript and powder, and dismissed the peddler. But the Caliph, being anxious to know what the manuscript contained, asked the Vizier if he knew of one who could decipher it.

"Gracious Sir and Master," answered the other, "in the large Mosque lives a man called Selim the Learned, who understands all languages; let him come; perhaps he understands these mysterious characters."

The learned Selim was soon fetched.

"Selim," spoke the Caliph to him, "Selim, they say that thou art very learned; peep a little into this manuscript to see whether thou canst read it. If thou canst read it thou shalt receive from me a new holiday dress; if not, thou shalt receive twelve strokes on the ear and five-and-twenty on the soles of the feet, because, without reason, they call thee Selim the Learned."

Selim prostrated himself and spoke: "Thy will be done, O Sir!" Long contemplated he the manuscript, but suddenly cried out: "This is Latin, O Sir, or let me be hanged."

"Say what is therein," commanded the Caliph, "if it be Latin."

Selim commenced to translate: "Of all mankind whosoever finds this, praise Allah for his grace. For whosoever snuffs of the powder in this box and thereupon says: *Mutabor* (a Latin word denoting a wish to be transformed), can be changed into any animal, and understand its language. When he wishes to return again to his human form, he bows himself three times towards the East and speaks that word. But let him take care when he is transformed that he laughs not, else the magic word vanishes completely from his memory, and he is and remains an animal."

As Selim the Learned thus read, the Caliph was pleased beyond measure. He made the learned man swear to tell no one at any time of the secret, presented him with a handsome dress, and dismissed him; but to his Grand Vizier he said: "That I call a good purchase, Mansor. How delightful to be an animal for a time.

Come thou to me early to-morrow morning. Then will we go together in the fields, snuff something out of the box, and listen to what is spoken in the air and water, amid the woods and in the fields."

The next morning the Caliph had scarcely dressed himself and broken his fast, when the Grand Vizier appeared, as his master had commanded, in order to accompany him in his walk. The Caliph stuck the box with the magic powder in his girdle, and, commanding his attendants to remain behind, went alone with the Grand Vizier on the way. They went first through the Caliph's large garden; but in vain sought some living thing in order to try the experiment. The Vizier finally proposed to go far away to a pond where he had often seen many animals, especially storks, which had attracted his attention through their grave ways and rattling bills.

The Caliph approved of the proposition of his Vizier, and went with him to the pond. As they arrived there they saw a stork going seriously to and fro, seeking frogs, and now and then clapping his bill together. At the same time they saw a stork high up in the air soaring towards them.

"By my beard, Gracious Master," said the Grand Vizier, "these two long-legs are holding a pretty talk with one another. How if we become storks?"

"Well spoken!" answered the Caliph, "but, beforehand, we will once more contemplate how to become men again. So! Bow three times towards the East, and say *Mutabor*. So again I am Caliph and thou Vizier. But, for heaven's sake, do not laugh, else are we lost!"

While the Caliph was speaking he saw the other stork flying over their heads and finally alight. He drew the box quickly out of his girdle, took a good pinch, offered it to the Grand Vizier, who likewise snuffed, and both cried *Mutabor!*"

Then their legs shrivelled up and became thin and red; the pretty golden slipper of the Caliph and his companion became ill-shaped stork feet; the arms changed into wings, the necks grew quickly out of their shoulders, and became an ell long; the beard vanished, and their bodies were presently covered with soft feathers.

"You have a pretty bill, Sir Grand Vizier," spoke the Caliph, with great astonishment. "By the beard of the prophet, I have never seen anything like it in my life."

"Thanks!" most submissively returned the Vizier, while he bowed himself, "but, if I may dare venture, your highness looks like the storks near us, but even more attractive as Caliph. But, come, if it pleases you, that we watch our companions yonder and learn whether we truly understand the stork language."

At this instant the other stork dropped upon the ground, and with her beak she cleaned her feet, preened herself, and then went to the other stork. The two new storks hastened to approach them, and, to their great astonishment, heard the following conversation:

"Good morning, Lady Longlegs. Already so early upon the meadow?"

"Many thanks, dear Rattlebill; I am taking a little breakfast. Possibly you would like a quarter of a lizard or a leg of a young frog?"

"Thanks, but I have no appetite to-day. I come on the meadow upon another errand. I shall dance to-day before my father's guests, and I wish to have a little quiet practice."

At the same the young stork pranced with strange movements through the field, while the Caliph and Mansor watched her with astonishment. But as she stood upon one foot in a picturesque attitude, the while gracefully flapping her wings, they could no longer contain themselves, and incessant laughter broke from their bills. It was a long time before they recovered their composure, but the Caliph composed himself, and said: "That was a sight which could not be bought with gold. It is a pity that these dumb animals have been frightened by our laughter, else had they certainly regaled us with song!"

But at this moment it occurred to the Vizier that laughing was forbidden during the transformation. He therefore imparted his anxiety to the Caliph. "By Mecca and Medina, it will be a sorry pastime if I must remain a stork! Dost thou remember the stupid word?"

"I cannot, I fear. Three times towards the East we should bow, and, in doing so, say 'Mu-Mu-Mu.'"

They then faced towards the East, and bowed incessantly, so that their bills touched the ground. But, O Misery! The magic word had escaped them. As often as the Caliph bowed himself, his Vizier despairingly cried, "Mu-Mu," but remembrance of the magic word did not come to them, and the poor Caliph and his Grand Vizier were and remained storks.

Thus enchanted, they wandered through the fields. They knew not what to do in their misery. They could not get out of their stork skins; they could not return to the city to make themselves known, for who would believe the statement of a stork, that he was the Caliph? And even if they did believe, would the inhabitants of Bagdad want a stork for a Caliph?

So they sneaked about for many days, and scantily supported life on the products of the field, which they could not easily eat through their long bills. As to the lizards and frogs, the human storks had no appetite for such morsels, especially as they feared to disorder their stomachs and suffer from indigestion. The one pleasure they had in this situation, was that they could fly; and they often flew upon the roofs of Bagdad, in order to see what was taking place there.

During the first few days they observed a great commotion and an appearance of mourning in the streets. But on the fourth day of their enchantment, they by chance alighted on the Caliph's palace, and from thence saw below them in the street a gorgeous procession passing. Drums and fifes resounded, and a man in gold-embroidered scarlet mantle sat upon a richly-caparisoned horse and was surrounded by brilliantly bedecked servants. Half Bagdad ran after him, and all shrieked: "Hail, Mizra, the ruler of Bagdad!"

Then the two storks on the roof of the palace looked at each other, and the Caliph Chasid spoke: "Canst thou now guess, oh Grand Vizier, why I am enchanted? This Mizra is the son of my mortal enemy, the powerful sorcerer Raschner, who in an evil hour swore vengeance on me. But I will not yet give up hope. Come with me, thou faithful companion of my destiny, we will wander to the graves of the prophets ; perhaps a holier place may break the enchantment."

They lifted themselves from the roof of the palace and flew towards the country of Medina. Their flying was not very good, as the two storks had had little practice, and, after a couple of hours, "Oh, Sir!" groaned the Grand Vizier, "with your permission, I can endure it no longer. You fly too quickly; besides, it is evening, and it would be well to find shelter for the night!"

Chasid listened to the petition of his servant, and there in the valley perceived a ruin, which appeared as if it would afford shelter, so they flew there. The place where they came down for the night seemed to have formerly been a castle. Beautiful columns towered amid the shattered ruins, and many rooms, which were in a tolerably good state of preservation, bore witness to the former splendours of the building.

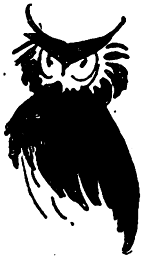
Chasid and his attendant went through the corridor to find a dry place. Suddenly the stork Mansor stopped.

"Sir and master," whispered he, softly, "if it is not foolish for a Grand Vizier to fear ghosts, it is even less so for a stork; but, in truth, I am sore afraid, for I hear a moaning near at hand. My courage has forsaken me, for I surely hear sighs and groans."

The Caliph remained quiet, and clearly heard a subdued weeping that appeared to come from a human being rather than an animal. Full of expectation, he hastened towards the place from whence came the plaintive sounds. But the Vizier pecked him on the wing with his bill, and beseeched him not to venture into new and unknown danger.

But in vain! The Caliph, whose heart remained valiant under his stork-wings, tore himself away with some loss of feathers, and hastened into a dark and gloomy corridor. He arrived speedily at a door, which appeared to be only on the latch, and from whence distinct sighs and low hootings were heard.

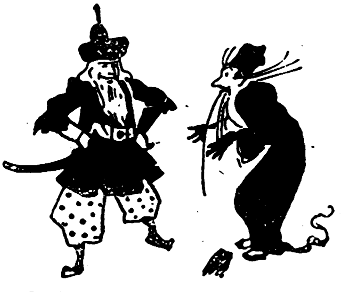
He pushed open the door with his bill, but stopped, surprised, upon the threshold. In the dilapidated room, that was only scantily illumined through a little lattice window, he saw, sitting upon the floor, a large night-owl. Big tears rolled out of her large round eyes, and in a hoarse voice she poured forth her complaint from her crooked beak.



As she perceived the Caliph and his Vizier she raised a cry of joy, and with elegance of manner wiped the tears from her eyes with her big spotted wings. Then, to the great astonishment of both, she cried in good Arabic: "Welcome, O Storks. You come as a token to me of my deliverance; for it was prophesied to me in my childhood that a great happiness would come to me through storks."

When the Caliph recovered from his wonderment he brought together his thin feet with great dignity, and, bending his long neck, spoke as follows: "Night-owl, from thy words I believe I see in thee a fellow sufferer. But, alas! thy hope that through us salvation is secured is in vain. Thou wilt perceive our helplessness when thou hast heard our story." The Caliph then began to relate what we already know.

When he had ended his story, the owl thanked him, and said: "Hear also my story, and learn why I am no less unhappy than thou art. My father is the King of India; I am his unhappy and only daughter, named Ra. That sorcerer, Raschner, who has enchanted thee, has also doomed me to misery. He came one day to my father and desired me as wife for his son Mizra. But my father, who is a passionate man, had him thrown down stairs. That evening he prowled in the neighbourhood in another form, and, as I was in my garden taking refreshments, a disguised slave brought me a drink which transformed me into this detestable form. He then brought me hither fainting with fright, and in a frightful voice, cried: 'Here shalt thou remain, ugly and despised of all animals, until the end, or until someone shall take thee to wife in order to set thee free. Thus I revenge myself on thee and thy haughty father.'



"Since that time, many months have passed, and I live solitary and sad within these walls, detested by all the world, and looked at with horror by even the animals; beautiful Nature is shut out from me, as I am blind by day, and only when the pale light of the moon is reflected on these walls does the veil fall from my eyes."

The owl ceased speaking, and with her wings wiped away the tears which the narration of her sufferings had drawn.

The Caliph was plunged in deep thought by the narrative of the princess. "If all things do not deceive me, I perceive a certain connection between our unhappiness, but how can I find the key to this mystery?"

The owl answered: "Oh, sir! this my heart also foretold. It was prophesied to me in my youth by a wise woman that a stork would bring happiness to me, and possibly I know how we can save ourselves."

The Caliph was very much astonished, and asked what means she could suggest.

"The sorcerer who has made us both unhappy," said she, "comes to these ruins once every month. The banquet-hall is not far from this room, and he uses it for feasting with many companions. Already I have often heard them relate to one another their infamous deeds, and perhaps he may chance to speak aloud the magic word which has changed thee."

"Oh, dearest princess," cried the Caliph, "tell me when he comes again and where is this place to be found?"

The owl was silent for a minute, and then spoke: "Take it not unkindly, but only on one condition can I fulfil your wish."

"Speak, speak!" cried Chasid, "I am content with anything."

"It is this: I am desirous of being set free at the same time, and that can only be done if one of you will wed me."

The storks appeared perplexed by this proposition, and the Caliph beckoned to his servant to step aside with him. "Grand Vizier," spoke the Caliph, behind the door, "this is a foolish affair, but thou couldst certainly take her."

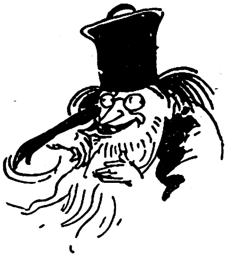
"Indeed," answered the other, "that I certainly could not do, for if I return home my wife would scratch my eyes out! Besides, I am an old man, and you are yet young and unmarried, and could easier give your hand in marriage to a pretty young princess."

"That is true," sighed the Caliph, while he sadly hung his wings, "but who told thee that she was young and pretty? I call this buying a wife in a sack."

They tried to persuade one another for a long time, but finally, as the Caliph saw that his Vizier would rather remain a stork than marry the owl, he resolved to fulfil the condition himself. The owl was overjoyed, and she confessed to them that they could not have come at a better time, as probably the sorcerer would arrive that very night.

She then left the room with the storks in order to conduct them to the banquet-hall, and they went for a long time through a gloomy corridor. Presently a bright light beamed upon a partially fallen wall, and as they reached the spot the owl advised them to keep very quiet.

From the opening upon which they stood they could overlook a large room, which was surrounded with gorgeously-decorated pillars. Many coloured lamps made up for the light of day, while in the middle of the room stood a round table covered with a great abundance of choice dishes. On a sofa encircling this table sat eight men, and in one of these men the storks recognised the peddler who had sold them the magic powder. His neighbour now called upon him to relate his latest deeds, and, among others, he told the story of the Caliph and his Vizier.

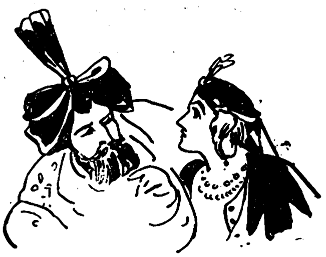


"What word hast thou given to them?" asked another sorcerer.

"A right strong Latin one—it is called *Mutabor*."

As the storks heard this through the broken wall they were nearly beside themselves with joy, and ran, so quickly upon their long legs to the door of the ruin, that the owl could scarcely follow. Then, said the Caliph, with emotion, to the owl: "Saviour of my life, and of the life of my friend, accept our eternal thanks, and for what thou hast done for us, take me as thy husband."

But soon they turned themselves to the East; three times the storks bowed their long necks towards the sun as it was rising from behind the mountains. "*Mutabor!*" cried they; and instantly they were changed, and in the great joy of returning life, master and servant lay smiling and weeping in one another's arms. But who can describe their astonishment at what they now saw. A beautiful lady, elegantly dressed, stood before them, and laughing, gave her hand to the Caliph.



"Do you not recognise your night owl?" said she.

It was she, indeed!

The Caliph was so delighted with her grace and beauty, that he cried out, "that it was now his greatest happiness that he had been a stork."

The three then drew near Bagdad, and the Caliph found in his dress the box with the magic powder, and also his money-bag. In the next village he bought what was necessary, and so they soon came to the gates of Bagdad. But there the arrival of the Caliph was witnessed with the greatest astonishment. The people had given him up for dead, and were overjoyed to have their loved ruler once more with them.

But for this reason their hatred towards the impostor, Mizra, raged all the stronger. They rushed to the palace, and took the old sorcerer and his son prisoners. The Caliph sent the elder to the same room in the ruins where the princess had lived as an owl, and left him hanging there. But the son, who understood nothing of the father's necromancy, the Caliph gave the choice whether he would die or snuff the powder. As he chose the latter, the Grand Vizier offered him the box. A suitable pinch, and the magic word of the Caliph transformed him into a stork, and the Caliph shut him in an iron cage and placed him in his garden.

Long and happily the Caliph lived with his wife, the princess. But his happiest moments were always when his Grand Vizier visited him in the afternoon. Oftentimes they spoke of their stork adventure, and if the Caliph was in a happy mood he condescended to imitate the Grand Vizier as he saw him as a stork. He stalked earnestly with stiff feet about the room, clapping his jaws together, fanning with his arms like wings, and showed how they uselessly bowed themselves towards the East and cried "Mu-Mu." To the wife of the Caliph and their children this representation was a great pleasure, but if the Caliph too long clapped and cried "Mu-Mu," the Vizier threatened to communicate what transpired behind the door about the princess owl.

W. H.

KEEP YOUR EYE ON SHORT STORIES

LIST OF SERIALS SOON TO APPEAR.

IT CAME TO PASS.
The story of a runaway wife. (Commences to-day.)

THE TREASURES OF THE WHITE GOD.
The story of a shameful crime. (Commences September 7th.)

THE WRONG THAT WAS DONE.
The story of a loveless marriage.

SINBAD'S VALLEY.
A story of marvellous adventure.

THE MAN WITH THE CAMERA.
The startling story of a stolen fortune.

THE GREAT MIDDLEWICK BANK ROBBERY.
The story of a man hunt.

A GRAND NEW SERIAL STORY OF ADVENTURE BY GEORGE GRIFFTH.
Author of "The Outlaws of the Air," "The Angel of the Revolution," etc., etc.

A GRAND NEW SERIAL STORY BY HEADON HILL.
Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," etc., etc.

A GRAND NEW SERIAL STORY BY JOAN BARRETT.
Author of "Tales of Monte Carlo," "The Great D.M.S. Lottery."

The Heart of a Maid

THE sun had not yet risen, and a broad grey mist, extending even to Naples, and darkening the little villages along that coast, stretched over Mount Vesuvius. The sea was still, but on the wharf, beautifully located in a narrow bay under the high, rocky cliffs of Sorrento, fishermen and their wives were busy pulling ashore the boats with the nets that had been left out over night.

"See, Rachel, there is our priest," said an old woman to a little child of ten, who was wringing her distaff near by. "He is just getting into a boat. Anthony is to take him over to Capri. Goodness gracious! how drowsy the worthy gentleman looks!" With that she waved her hand in a friendly manner to the little priest, who had just taken his place in the boat. The others on the shore stopped their work to return the cordial greeting that the father had for them all.

"Are we to have fair weather, my boy?" asked the priest, looking doubtfully towards Naples.

"The sun is not yet up," replied the young fellow. "It will soon make way with the fog."

"Then row rapidly that we may reach Capri before it becomes hot." Anthony was just about to push the boat out into deep water, when he suddenly stopped and gazed towards the steep path leading from Sorrento down to the shore.

A young girl was visible there, walking rapidly down the steep ascent and beckoning with her handkerchief. She had an almost haughty, but rather uncouth manner, of tossing her head, and her black locks, hanging gracefully over her forehead, became like a diadem.

"Why are we waiting?" asked the priest.

"There comes someone towards the boat who wishes to go with us. With your permission, father, she may go, it will take no longer; she is only a young girl of scarcely eighteen."

At this moment the girl stepped from behind the wall that bounded the path. "Laurella!" said the priest, "what calls her to Capri?"

Anthony shrugged his shoulders. The girl hastened forward, her eyes fixed straight before her.

"Good morning, Laurella," said the priest. "How are you to-day? Are you also going to Capri?"

"If I may be permitted, father."

"Ask Anthony, he is the owner of the boat. Everyone is master of his own possessions, and God is ruler over all."

"There is half a lire (5d.)," she said, without looking up, "if I may go for that."

"You can make better use of it than I," muttered the young fellow, pushing aside some baskets of oranges to make room for her. He was to sell them at Capri, as the rocky island did not produce enough for the demand of the numerous visitors.

"I don't want to be carried for nothing," replied the girl, with a twitch of her black eyebrows.

"Come along, child," said the priest, "he is a generous youth and does not want to make money out of you. There, get in"—as he reached her his hand—"and sit down here by me. See, he has thrown down his jacket for you, so that you may sit comfortably. He has not treated me so well, but with young people that is always the way. For a young lady more pains will be taken than for a dozen clergymen. Well, well, Anthony, you need make no excuse. It is God's will that like should take to like."

Laurella, in the meantime, got in and seated herself, pushing aside the jacket without saying a word. The young boatman let it lie and murmured between his teeth. Then he pushed powerfully against the pier, and the boat sped out into the gulf.

"Has that artist, the Neapolitan, who wished to marry you, been heard of lately?" asked the priest.

She shook her head.

"He came once to paint your portrait. Why did you refuse him?"

"What did he want of it? There are others more beautiful than I. And then—who knows what he would have done with it? He might have bewitched me with it, and charmed my soul, my mother said."

"Do not believe such horrible things," said the priest, earnestly. "You could easily see that he loved you. Would he otherwise have wished to marry you?"

"I want no husband, never!" she said, quite haughtily, and yet almost to herself.

"Have you made a vow, or do you wish to become a nun?"

She shook her head.

She had nothing more to say. The priest also became quiet.

When after a two hours' journey they glided into the harbour of Capri, Anthony carried the reverend gentleman over the shallow waves and set him down on the shore. Laurella, however, did not wait for him to wade back and carry her in the same manner, but gathering up her skirts, holding her bundle in one hand and her wooden shoes in the other, splashed hurriedly to shore.

"I think I shall stay at Capri," said the priest, "and you need not wait for me. Perhaps I shall not return until to-morrow, and you, Laurella, when you return, remember me to your mother; I will try to call this week. You will return before night, I suppose."

"If I have an opportunity," she said.

"You know that I must go back," said Anthony, in what seemed to him a very indifferent tone. "I will wait for you until sunset, but if you do not come it will make no difference."

"You must come," interrupted the priest. "You must not leave your mother alone over night. Is it far to the place where you are going?"

"To Anacapri."

"And I am going to Capri. God protect you, my child, and you, my son."

Laurella kissed his hand and uttered a farewell parting, in which the priest and Anthony might share, but the latter took no part of it for himself. He lifted his hat to the priest, but paid no attention to Laurella.

When they had both turned their backs on him, he allowed his eyes for a short time to follow the priest, who stepped carefully over the coarse gravel, and then turned them towards the girl, who had wandered up the steep bank at the right, holding her hand over her eyes to protect them from the sun. Just before the path was lost between the walls on the hill-top, she stopped, as if to catch her breath, and looked about her. The sea lay at her feet: round about her towered the rugged rocks; the water was blue, and in rare splendour—it was, indeed, a spectacle worth beholding. By chance her glance glided by Anthony's boat and met his gaze. They both started as if to excuse themselves, and Laurella resumed her journey with firmly-closed lips.

It was only an hour past noon, and Anthony had already been sitting for two hours in front of the fisherman's tavern. Something seemed to occupy his mind, for every few minutes he would jump up, step out into the sunshine, and look carefully over the two roads that lead, on the right and on the left, to the two island town.

Suddenly he sprang up. "I must go," he said. "Here is my passenger from Sorrento, who came over with us this morning, and who wants to go back to her sick mother before night."

"Oh, well, it is a long time before night," said the fisherman, "she will have time to drink a glass of wine. Wife, bring a glass."

"Thank you, I do not care for any," said Laurella, and remained at some distance.

"Fill up the glass, wife; she will drink it."

"Let her alone," said Anthony, "she is stubborn; what she does not want to do, no saint can persuade her to do." Thereupon he took a hasty departure, went down to the boat, loosened the rope, and stood waiting for the girl. She waved a farewell to the tavern keepers, and with trembling steps followed him. She looked about in all directions as if expecting other company, but the landing was deserted; the fishermen were either sleeping or fishing, a few women were sitting in the doorways dozing or spinning, and the strangers who had come over in the morning preferred to wait and return in the cool of the evening. She had not time to look round long, for before she could prevent it Anthony took her in his arms and carried her like a child to the boat. Then he jumped in, and with a few brisk strokes of the oars they were out on the deep water.

She seated herself in the prow with her back half turned towards him, so that he could see only the side of her face. Her features were more serious than usual; her hair hung down over her forehead, a haughty expression played around her nose, and her mouth was firmly closed. After they had been some little time on the water she began to feel the heat of the sun, and taking the bread from her handkerchief, she put the latter over her head and began to eat the bread, for, as she had not stopped to eat anything at Capri, she was very hungry.

It was not long before Anthony took two oranges from a basket that had been full in the morning, and said: "Eat these with your bread, Laurella. Do not think that I have saved them for you; they rolled out of a basket into the boat, and I found them here when I put the empty baskets back again."

"You eat them; my bread is enough for me."

"They are refreshing on a warm day, and you have walked a long distance."

"They gave me a glass of water up there, and that refreshed me."

"As you like," he said, and dropped them into the basket.

Again there was silence; the sea was as smooth as glass, and there was scarcely a ripple at the keel. Even the white seagulls flew silently after their prey.

"You might take the oranges to your mother," continued Anthony.

"We have some at home, and when they are gone I will go and buy some more."

"Take them to her with my compliments."

"She does not know you."

"Then you can tell her who I am."

"I do not know you, either."

This was the first time that she had denied knowing him. A year before, when the artist had first come to Sorrento, it happened that Anthony and some other young fellows were, one Sunday, playing ball near the principal street. There the Neapolitan first met Laurella, as she passed by without noticing him, carrying a pitcher on her head. The artist, struck by the sight, stopped and gazed at her, forgetting that he was on the ground occupied by the players. A rough ball striking his ankle reminded him that that was not the place to lose oneself in thought.

He looked round, expecting an apology, but the young boatman who had thrown the ball stood silent and defiant among his companions, and the stranger thought it best to depart quietly. The event, however, was talked of, and recently, too, when the artist wooed Laurella.

"I do not know him," she said, when her suitor asked if she had refused him on account of that impolite fellow. She, too, had heard of that gossip, but afterwards she certainly did recognise Anthony when she met him.

Now they sat there in the boat as bitterest enemies, and the heart of each was beating violently. Anthony's kind face was greatly agitated; he beat the waves with his oars, and splashed the spray all over himself, and his lips frequently trembled as if he were on the point of saying something unkind. She pretended not to notice it, looked somewhat embarrassed, leant over the edge of the boat, and let the water run between her fingers. Then she loosened her handkerchief and arranged her hair, as though alone in the boat. Her eyebrows twitched, and in vain did she put her wet hands to her burning cheeks to cool them.

Now they were far out on the water. Not a boat was to be seen; the island was far in their rear, and the coast lay far off in the hazy sunlight. Not even a seagull broke the loneliness. Anthony looked around him, a thought flashed into his mind, his redness suddenly left him; he let the oars drop. Laurella involuntarily looked up, anxious but fearless.

"This must come to an end," said he. "It has lasted altogether too long, and I am really surprised that I have not been ruined by it. You do not know me you say. Have you not seen for a long time how I have conducted myself towards you, and have you not known how full my heart is? and yet you always treat me coolly and turn your back on me."

"Have I ever encouraged you? Am I to blame if you lose your head? What claim have you over me?"

"You will not talk in that way long," he said, trembling from head to foot. "I am man enough not to let my life be destroyed by such an obstinate girl. Do you realise that you are in my power and must do as I wish?"

She started up and gazed at him, saying slowly: "Kill me if you dare!"

"One must not do things by halves," said he, and his voice became hoarse. "There is room for us both in the sea. I cannot help you, my child, but we must go down together, and now!" he cried, in a loud voice, and quickly siezed her in his arms. But, in a moment, he drew back his right hand; it was bleeding—she had bitten him.

"Must I do as you wish?" she said, pushing him from her. "We will see if I am in your power!" and then she jumped into the water and disappeared for a moment.

She soon came to the surface; her clothes clung close to her; her hair was dishevelled by the waves, and hung over her neck. She struck out boldly with her arms, and, without uttering a word, swam away from the boat, towards the shore. A sudden fright overcame the would-be lover, who stood there leaning over, and followed her with his eyes, as if a miracle were being unfolded before him. Collecting his thoughts, he grasped the oars and pulled towards her with all the strength he could summon.

In a moment he was at her side, although she was swimming very fast. "By all that is sacred," he cried, "come into the boat. I have been a fool; like a flash from heaven something came into my head, and I knew not what I did. I do not ask for forgiveness, but I beg of you to get into the boat and save your life."

She swam on as though she heard nothing.

"You cannot reach the land, it is two miles away. Think of your mother. If any misfortune should happen to you it would kill her."

With a glance she measured the distance to the shore, and then, without answering, swam to the boat, and seized the edge of it with her hands. He rose to help her; his jacket, which had been lying on the seat, slipped into the water when the boat was drawn to one side by the weight of the maiden. Quickly she climbed up and regained her former seat. When he saw that she was safe, he took up the oars once more, while she wrung the water from her dripping skirts and from her wet hair.

Then she looked down and noticed the blood. She cast a hasty look at the hand, which, as though unwounded, was pulling away at the oar. "There!" she said, and handed him her handkerchief. He shook his head and rowed onward. She rose, stepped towards him, and bound the handkerchief about the deep wound. Then, although he objected, she took the oar from his hand, and without looking at him, but looking at the oar all stained with blood, she pushed the boat forward with powerful strokes. Both were pale and still. As they came nearer to land they were met by fishermen, who greeted Anthony and teased Laurella. Neither of them looked up or made any answer.

The sun was high in the heavens when they reached the wharf. Laurella shook out her skirts, which had now become nearly dry, and sprang to shore.

"Good-bye," said Laurella, and turned to the path leading up the hill towards her home.

"Good-day," answered Anthony, without looking at her. Then he carried the things out of his boat and climbed the stone steps leading to his cabin.

He was alone in the two rooms through which he now passed back and forth. Through the little open window the air was blowing much more refreshingly than it had been out on the water, and, on the whole, he was well pleased with the solitude.

Time was heavy on his hands; he longed for the darkness, for he was tired, and the loss of blood had weakened him more than he had supposed. He felt a violent pain in his hand, sat down on a stool and loosened the bandage. The blood gushed forth again, and the hand was badly swollen round the wound. He washed it carefully and cooled it a long time. When he drew it from the water, he could distinguish clearly the prints of Laurella's teeth.

"She was right," he said, "I was a beast, and I deserve nothing better. I shall send her her handkerchief to-morrow, for I don't want her to see me again."

The bright moonlight and the pain in his hand awakened him from a restless sleep, and he was just springing up to quiet in cold water the throbbing in his hand, when he heard a noise at his door. He opened it, and Laurella stood before him.

Without saying much she entered, and threw off the wrap she had worn over her head, and put a little basket on the table. Then she stopped to breathe.

"You came for your handkerchief, I suppose?" said he. "You might have spared yourself the trouble, for I would have sent it to you in the morning."

"That had nothing to do with my coming," she quickly replied. "I have been out on the mountain, gathering herbs to heal your hand. There!" and she raised the cover of the basket.

"Heavens!" cried he. "Are you ill? You are trembling from head to foot."

"It is nothing," she said. "I am going now," and she tottered towards the door. Here she burst into a fit of weeping, which so overpowered her that she pressed her brow against the doorpost and sobbed loudly and violently. Before he could reach her she turned suddenly and threw her arms round his neck.

"I can't stand it any longer," she cried, and pressed him to her, passionately. "Strike me, trample me under foot, or, if it is still true that you love me even yet, after all the evil that I have done you, then take me and treat me as you wish, make of me what you will, but do not send me thus away from you!"

Silently he held her awhile in his arms.

"Whether I still love you?" he cried, finally. "By all that is sacred! Do you suppose that all my heart's blood has run out through that little wound? Don't you feel it beating there in my breast, just as though it would come out and to you? If you say this merely to tempt me, or because you have pity on me, then go. I will forget even this. You must not imagine that you owe me this because you know what I suffer on your account."

"No," she said, firmly, and looked up from his shoulders with her moistened eyes. "I love you, and now that I have said it, I will confess that I have long striven against it. But now I will become different, for I cannot longer stand it not to look at you when you meet me in the street. Now I will kiss you, too, so that when you are in doubt you can remember 'she kissed me,' and Laurella kisses no one except him whom she wishes to marry."

She kissed him thrice, and then freed herself, saying: "Good-night, my dear; go now to sleep, and nurse your hand, but don't go home with me, for I am not afraid."

With that she darted through the door and disappeared in the darkness.

When the little priest left the church after Laurella's next confession, he smiled quietly to himself.

"Now may the Lord bless her," he said, "and let me live until Laurella's eldest boy can row me across the bay in place of his father."

P. H.

THE OUTLAWS' TREASURE

SUMMARY.

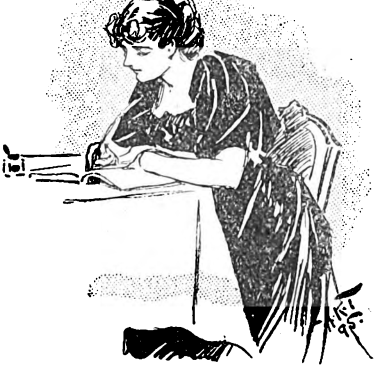
The mail train has been robbed between Cornwall and La Grange stations, and £20,000 worth of gold stolen by a gang of desperadoes, headed by two brothers named Mulligan. Two passengers on the train —Adolph Squirrek, *alias* Smith, a detective tracking the Mulligans, and Fred Weldon, a young lawyer—who have struck up an acquaintance on the way, alight at Somerville, where the former stopped at the "Drover," and the latter at his mother's house. During the night a message comes to say that Judge Woodland's horse has come back alone, and Weldon, together with Squirrek and two other men, set out to find him, and discover one of Mulligan's confederates lying senseless on the road. The man, who had made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the judge, is sentenced to forty years' imprisonment. At Judge Woodland's Weldon meets a Spaniard named Alvarido Almanaz, and the two men become rivals for the love of Florence, the judge's daughter. Weldon is inveigled to a lonely bridge near Cornwall, and disappears. Squirrek pays a fruitless visit to the spot. Squirrek arouses the citizens of Cornwall, who make their way to the outlaws' hiding-place. One outlaw is found and killed, and the cabin is set fire to. Squirrek discovers a piece of paper with the following cryptogram: "1——0——1. Cfujk't Bsdfj 50zct Mpqug Vmeds sid X gjsf Nbg." He afterwards falls in with the two remaining outlaws, and has them arrested. They are lynched by a furious mob. Both Florence Woodland and her father have dreams of Señor Almanaz in connection with Fred Weldon's disappearance. The Señor leaves Somerville professedly for Cuba.

CHAPTER XXIII.

(From the Journal of Florence Woodland.)

FLORENCE SOLVES A RIDDLE FOR TWO PEOPLE.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER ———.—The days come and go, with their sadness to some and their joys to others. There seems no reason why I should not be as happy as a young person in the best of health, with the kindest and most indulgent of parents, should be.



The journal of Florence Woodland.

And so I am except that I feel for the grief of poor Mrs. Weldon, who still clings to the belief that her son is living somewhere, and is in need of her help. Poor soul! I have given up the faint hope that I once shared with her, and I pray that her Heavenly Father will heal the great woe which has fallen upon her.

Yesterday I received a letter from Señor Almanaz, written in Chicago, where he said he was compelled to remain a few days to settle up some business affairs. It was very polite, and he was gentlemanly enough to make no reference to our last interview. After giving me his best wishes, he asked as a personal favour, which, as he says, will be the only one he will ever ask. I cannot refuse to grant it, as it is in my power to do so.

"I have been told," so his letter reads, "that you have a special aptitude in solving enigmas, riddles, and cipher-writing. A friend placed in my hand, some time since, some cipher, with the request that I would translate it for him. I confess that I cannot do so. If you find yourself able to make out the meaning, and will be kind enough to send it to me, you will make me ever your debtor. Here it is:

"'1—0—1.'

"'Cfujk't Bsdfj 50zct Mpqug Vmeds sid X gjsf Nbg.'

"May I ask further that you will let this little matter remain a mutual secret."

As this seems to be a harmless request, and I felt that perhaps I had been a little unjust towards him, I set to work to unravel his riddle for him.

It was not the hardest thing of the kind that I ever undertook, and I succeeded after a few hours. The figures "1—0—1," at the top, contain the key, which I discovered after pretty severe labour, and then I read it without trouble. There does not seem much meaning in it; but such as it is he is welcome, and I simply wrote out my translation and posted it to him, only adding that I was glad to do him so slight a favour.

SATURDAY EVENING.—What does it mean? The letter to Señor Almanaz has scarcely left my hands, when the following reaches me:

"Chicago, November ——.

"Miss Florence Woodland,—Please undertake a task, which although it may not be difficult to you, I am unable to accomplish. Your father once remarked your singular ability at unravelling difficult problems and riddles, which he said you displayed in early childhood. Here is something that has floored me:

"'1—0—1'

"'Cfujk't Bsdfj 50zct Mpqug Vmeds sid X gjsf Nbg.'

"I have racked my brains over it in vain. If your fortunate faculty in hieroglyphical lore will enable you to decipher this, I may succeed in getting you a commission upon what future rosetta stones the English Government may discover in Egypt. But, seriously, you will do me a greater service than you imagine by unravelling this mystery, and, above all, let me caution you to keep this a secret, and should you receive a *request from any other source, pay no attention to it. Don't forget this!* You, no doubt, will be willing to trust me in this matter. "—— SMITH."

This is certainly a strange letter, and it made me feel uncomfortable. As soon as I had read it, I went straight to the post-office to intercept the one I had sent to Señor Almanaz, but I was just too late.

Feeling that I might have done something very wrong, I went to father, explained the whole thing, and asked him what it was best for me to do.

"Telegraph to Smith," he replied, "and we can then head off this other letter."

We made ready to do so, but an insuperable object presented itself. Mr. Smith had simply dated his letter "Chicago" without giving the least indication of where he was stopping, so that it was impossible to tell where to direct the telegram. It looks as if he had taken pains to get an envelope which contained not the least reference to his hotel.

"There is no use in crying over spilt milk," said father, in his philosophic manner. "What's done can't be helped, and all you can do is to send your reply to Smith, stating what has happened, so that possibly it may be in his power to rectify the mistake."

I did so at once, and the next mail to Chicago carried my translation and explanatory letter to Mr. Smith. I only hope it has not been sent too late to accomplish all that he wishes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

(From the Journal of Adolph Squirrek, Detective.)

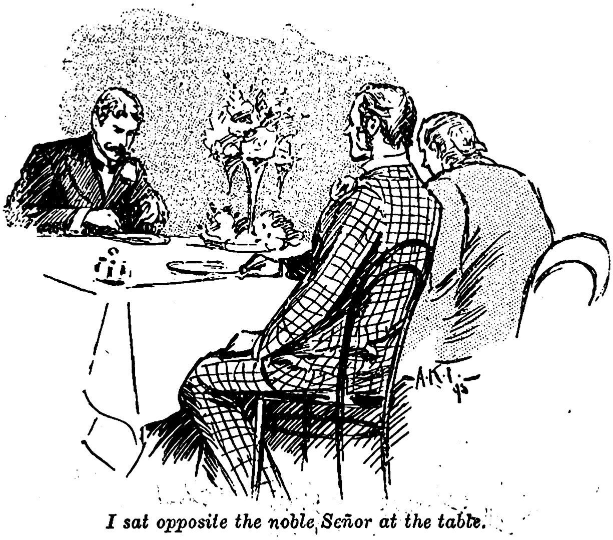
Senor Almanaz Pays a Visit to a Doctor.

Chicago, November.—Señor Alvarido Almanaz is the bird for me to pluck. If I lose sight of him I lose all. He carries the secret of Fred Weldon with him until he is forced to give it up.

It was the handsome Señor who sent the note of warning to the judge and witnesses in the trial of "poor Tom Borie," and it was the same individual who penned the note which led Fred Weldon to the High Bridge over Devil's Creek on that night, a couple of weeks ago, when I failed to warn him in time. The noble Señor was connected with the late Mulligan brothers, in precisely what character I can only conjecture. I can see how convenient such a fellow would be to make away with money and jewels that were likely to be identified, while his tastes led him to keep aloof from intimate association with the members of the gang themselves.

As the noble Señor strongly suspects me of dogging his footsteps, it becomes necessary for me to put on one of the best disguises at my commnnd. I think I have succeeded in "closing up his eye," as the vulgar phrase goes.

On Thursday evening the Señor called upon Miss Woodland, and bade her good-bye, as he proposed starting for Cuba next morning. I suspect she gave him his dismissal, as he strode very angrily down the lane, not even glancing up at the coarse-looking drover that he encountered on his way, and who bade him "good-evening" so civilly.



I sat opposite the noble Señor at the table.

The same night the handsome foreigner started for his Cuba, which, in this instance, means Chicago, and in the same carriage with him rode the humble individual who is just now engaged in writing up his journal.

The Señor bought a through ticket, as also did the humble individual referred to, and when we were fairly under way, he took out the piece of writing which is so difficult to read, and began studying it. By glancing over his shoulder I saw that it was precisely the same as the one held in my pocket-book; but as I became convinced sometime since that it was altogether beyond my skill, I contented myself with reading the *Chicago Tribune.*

Nothing further worthy of note occurred on our journey to Chicago, save that we ran over a cow, and the noble Señor turned pale with fear at the remote prospect of all of us going down the embankment, and into eternity.

We both took rooms at the same hotel, and without attracting suspicion, I secured one adjoining his. When a man sets himself up to keep guard over another, it is well to have him as close at hand as possible.

Both of us were well tired out with our journey, and as the evening was well advanced, I concluded he would need rest as much as myself, and so I tumbled in for the night.

On our way from the distant town of Somerville to this teeming city, the eye of the noble Señor more than once fell upon me. It follows, as a matter of course, that if he runs against me in the hotel, he will have his suspicions awakened, no matter how perfect I may make my disguise.

As a matter of business, therefore, I came out in a new rig—a sort of free-and-easy man of the town, who had an abundance of leisure upon his hands, and to whom, therefore, it might seem natural that he should be given to wandering about the city.

In my new get-up I sat opposite the noble Señor at the table, and tested my disguise by attempting to open a conversation with him. He replied politely, but coolly, and, I am sure, looked upon me in no other light than that of a perfect stranger.

After being at the hotel a couple of days, I have learned that the noble Señor has friends in this city, and once or twice he has visited them, and on each occasion has given me the slip, for which I deserve to be kicked by the first man I meet.

Yesterday he went inside the bar and wrote a letter. He took such precautions while engaged in doing so that I could not get a glimpse of the sheet, but when he had directed it he banged the blotting-paper down upon it, and hurried out of the room.

After a moment's thought I concluded to follow him, as I could afford to lose a little time with the blotting-paper, while there was none to be lost if I wished to keep him under my eye.

He went straight to the post-office, and then came directly back again, and retired to his room. Immediately after this I found occasion to go behind the bar, and took up the blotting-paper pad and examined it.

The pad showed that the noble Cuban had written a letter to Miss Florence Woodland, at Somerville.

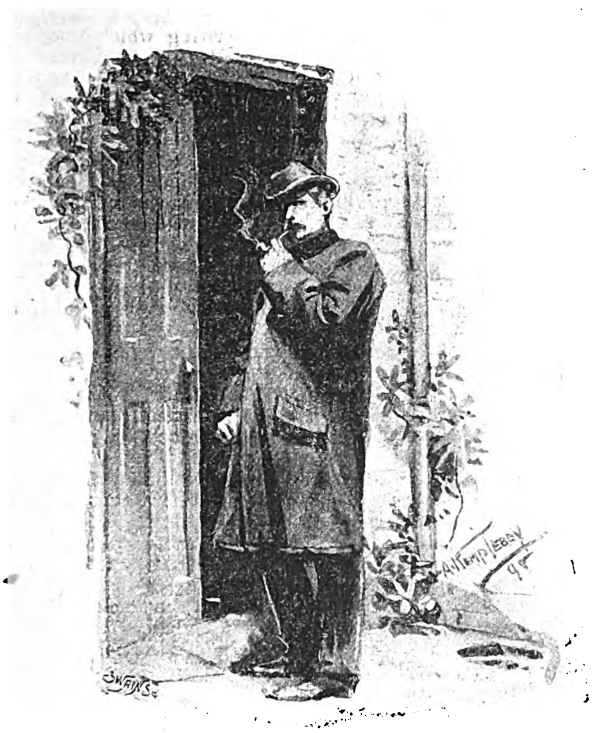
And what business has he to write to her? If she has rejected or repulsed him she has done it in a manner which leaves no room for him to renew his attentions. It can't be that; it must be upon a matter of business.

Hold!

That evening of the party at Judge Woodland's, when he and I were engaged in a game of chess, he remarked upon the great skill his daughter displayed in the game, she never having been beaten by anyone. He added that she also had a more extraordinary ability in reading ciphers, and had more than once assisted him in tracing crime by this gift.

Now, the noble Señor has probably learned the same thing, and has applied to her for assistance in making out the puzzle which has baffled both him and me.

He has got the start of me here, and it will be hard work for me to head him off; but it does not seem possible that the skill of Miss Woodland is such as to enable her to unravel the puzzle without several days' study, and I can reach her in time to stop this little game of the gentleman from the Gem of the Antilles.



I had a glimpse of his confederate.

FRIDAY.—My letter was written and sent, and at the office I learnt the precise hour when the post from Somerville reaches Chicago. A little figuring shows that if a letter leaves that goodly town on the afternoon of Saturday (which will give Miss Woodland several hours to work upon the cipher, providing it promptly reaches her), it will be ready for delivery at the Chicago post-office at precisely six o'clock in the evening of Monday, providing no unforeseen accident occurs to prevent.

This is rather favourable, as that is the hour of tea, and the Señor is a healthy eater, and, I observe, does not go out until about an hour after his evening meal, when he lights his Havanna, and saunters so far away that it is almost morning before he gets back again.

Provided he does not wait for the post at the office, this will give me a chance to forestall him. As such a man has no business to send anything to Miss Woodland, it follows, as a matter of course, that he has no right to receive anything from her, and I must do my utmost to prevent it.

EVENING.—Miss Florence Woodland has more skill than I imagined.

She received this puzzle from the noble Señor by one mail, translates and sends the reply the next day, and the whole mystery is unveiled and in my possession this evening.

I took the precaution to give a new touch to my whiskers when I went to the post-office, and called at the window-slide, as it hardly would have done for me to have been identified by the post clerk.

On my way back to tea I met the Cuban, who, I think, wore quite an expectant look on his olive countenance. Ah, me! disappointment comes to all in the affairs of this world.

I am sorry that Miss Woodland will have to lie under the apprehension of having made a bad mistake, but I trust I shall soon be able to set her mind at rest.

All that I am afraid of is that, failing there, the noble Señor may turn elsewhere for help in this matter. If he should get it, he may make a good deal of trouble; but, as he is now in Chicago, he will be likely to remain there until his business is fully settled. At any rate, I do not think he will take up his abode in the gem of the Antilles for some months yet.

I have had a glimpse of his confederate, or perhaps more properly his tool—a low-browed, brutal-looking man, who waited on the outside of the door for him, and the two walked off together. This man answers to the name of Manuel, and is a Spaniard, so that I could not understand anything that passed between them, except an occasional "Tiene usted," "Yo tengo," "Si, señor," "El le tiene," and a few other simple phrases of this language which I have picked up here and there.

They led me a long tramp, going across the river, and to the outskirts of the city, where they halted at a respectable house, rang the bell, and passed in. Walking by the door, I saw on the plate the name, "S. S. Ruthven, M.D."

I waited on the other side of the street for about half an hour, when my two friends emerged to view, talking very earnestly. If I were only barbarian enough to understand the language of Hispaniola, I might have gained a clue to what they were driving at, but it was all "Greek" to me, and as incomprehensible as the cipher submitted to Miss Florence Woodland. I wonder now whether she wouldn't translate their gibberish for me if I should take it down and send it to her?

The noble Señor and his friend Manuel were engaged in such earnest conversation that they came near walking into the river before they discovered that the drawbridge was open.

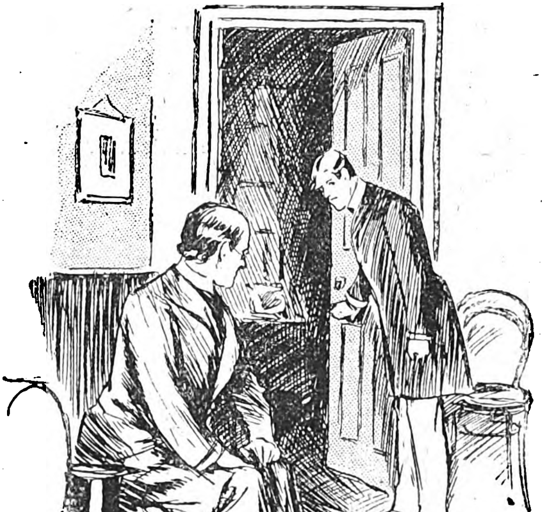
They kept company until they reached the hotel, and there they went in together, and side by side ascended to the room of the Cuban. I could overhear their words, but, as it was in that wretched foreign tongue, it did me as little good as it did the silent banisters beside me.

CHAPTER XXV.

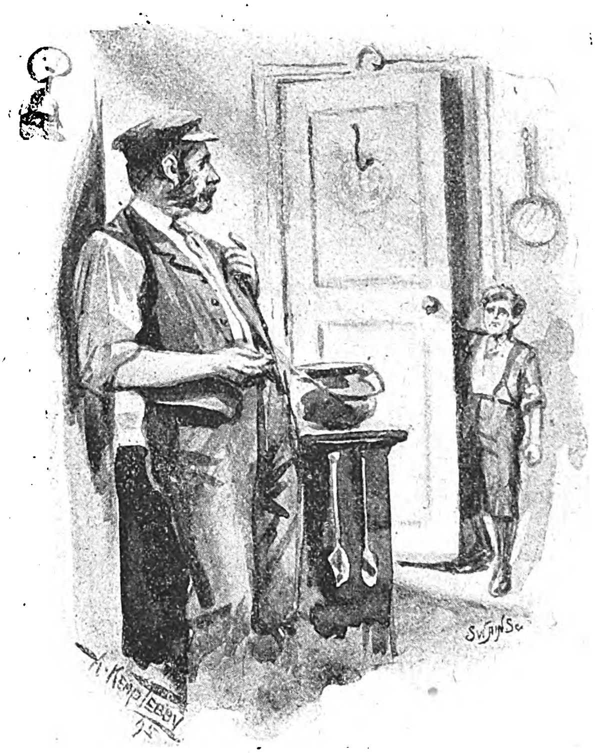
AN IMPORTANT BIT OF INFORMATION.

I CALLED on Doctor Ruthven this morning, to procure some medicine for the rheumatism.

As I rang the bell during his regular office hours, I was



Just step back into my private office.



A dirty-faced urchin entered the room.

fortunate enough to find him in, and to be received with considerable blandness and consideration.

I was in a sort of ministerial costume, with my white neckerchief and golden spectacles, and I have no doubt the physician supposed I belonged to the cloth.

After procuring the medicine and paying his fee, I picked up my hat as if to go, but kept my seat on the sofa, and looking steadily towards him, and speaking as though the idea had just entered my head, I asked:

"Is there much general sickness at present in Chicago?"

"Nothing more than usual; in fact, the public health is rather better than it was during the corresponding quarter last year."

"Is there much fever encountered in your practice?"

"No; I have but one case on my hands."

"Typhus?"

"Yes, or rather the indications are of that nature; but—is there anything more that I can do for you this morning?"

This abrupt answer, together with a sudden flushing of the physician's face, proved conclusively that he had unwittingly revealed something which he should have kept to himself, and his curt query was not only intended as a check to any curiosity upon my part, but as a hint that he would be glad to see me go.

I was on dangerous ground, and prudence told me to retreat. So I rose to my feet, buttoned my overcoat, and drew on my gloves.

"I am obliged to you for your kindness, doctor; hold, there is a little matter upon which I would like to speak to you."

This sudden changing of mind upon my part was caused by the jingling of the surgery bell.

"You'll have to excuse me for a few minutes," he said, walking towards the door to answer the signal himself. "Just step back into my private office until I am through with my visitor." This was the very thing for which I was manœuvring, and I gladly obeyed, while the doctor drew the door behind him.

The minute he was far enough away I rose and softly opened the door the slightest crack in the world, so as to give me a chance of overhearing what passed between the physician and his patient.

A detective police officer must take advantage of every means offered him for obtaining information.

Just what I was praying for! The visitor was the noble Señor Almanaz, who bade the physician good-morning in his usually bland manner.

"You haven't been there since last evening?" was the inquiring remark of the Cuban.

"No; there is no necessity for it. Have you seen him this morning?"

"Yes; I came from there an hour ago."

"How does he seem?"

"I don't know how to answer. The truth of it is," said the Cuban, in a voice so low that I barely managed to catch it, "we can't keep him this way much longer. He must either get well or do the other thing. You see what a constitution he has. The minute we give him a chance he rallies, and then you have to dose him so hard that it takes him to the very border of death."

"Yes, that is true," was the indifferent reply of the doctor. "How much do you expect to make by this speculation?"

"I can't tell. There is a detective on the track and I'm waiting for him to offer a reward, but he hangs back. I've been disappointed in another place," added the noble Señor, somewhat dejectedly, and with his Spanish "Cara-a-a-h!"

"Ah!"

"Yes, if I hadn't been thrown off the track, I would have made enough to let this fellow go to the dogs; but, as it is, we must nurse him along, in the hope of hearing something from this detective."

"Have you taken any means to let him know that he is in Chicago?"

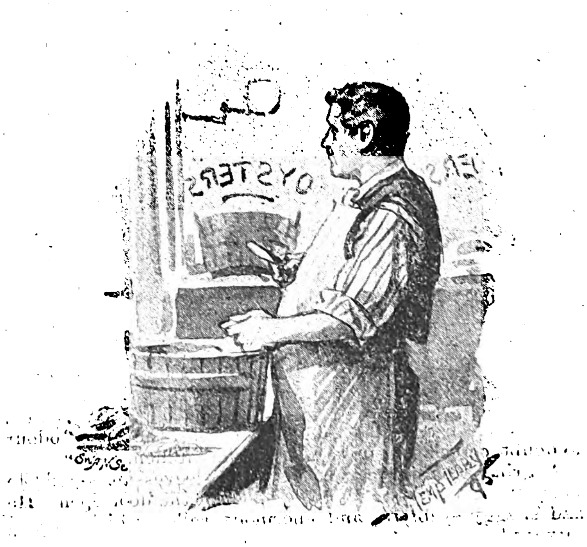
"Yes; a letter was sent to him several weeks ago, stating positively that the young man for whom he was searching was in this city."

"Didn't he bite?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Don't you think he is in Chicago?"

"I have scrutinised every suspicious person I have encountered since I have been here, but have seen no one



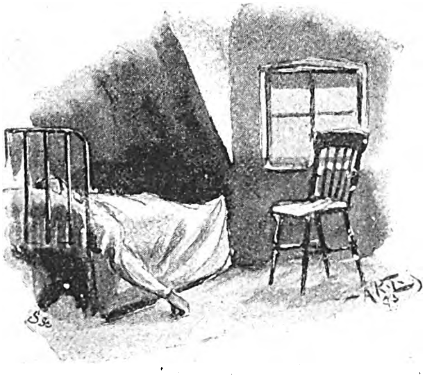
A short, stumpy, red-faced man.

that looks like him. I am afraid he has given over the search."

"Why don't you advertise? You know that is the fashion nowadays in a matter like this. Make the conditions that you are to receive a handsome figure, and no questions asked, or rather no prosecution guaranteed."

"I have thought of that," added the Cuban, after a pause, "but there is too much risk in it."

"Why so?"



The poor fellow was at the very door of death.

"I don't see how it can be done without setting that infernal detective on the track, and making a trouble. If you can think of any way, I'd like to hear it."

"It ain't likely *he'll* advertise at this late day," remarked the doctor, "and if he should get on your track, the best thing you can do is to leave. I don't see where *my* chance is to come in, and I would rather throw up my whole connection with the business than to continue any longer in it."

"I should think you were getting pretty good pay for your services," was the angry reply of the Cuban.

"If I continue my services I shall expect better remuneration than I have received."

There seemed to be a sullen silence for a few moments, and then Almanaz arose to his feet.

"We will call on him together this evening, and in the meantime I will take a look at him myself."

With this he departed; and as the doctor followed him to the outer door I managed to close the inner one, and when he opened it I was busily occupied in exploring "Doctor Dunglison's Dictionary of Medicine."

"Now, my friend, I am at your service."

"You must pardon me," I replied, taking out my watch, "but the hour is later than I imagined. I will call again."

He looked rather curiously at me as I passed out; but no doubt took me for an erratic Pickwickian dominie.

My great anxiety was to reach the street in time to follow Señor Alvarido Almanaz.

Fortunately, I succeeded in doing so.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Missing Man is Found.

I followed the Cuban at a safe distance, for I felt that matters were approaching a crisis, and a false move ment at this point might spoil all. He walked rapidly for fully half a mile, when he turned into one of the lowest and vilest streets of Chicago.

I felt that I was now upon the right trail, and it would not do to let my man escape me. Being in a disguise somewhat similar to that worn in Somerville when the gentleman from the "Gem of the Antilles" penetrated it, I was a little fearful of encountering him at this time.

But he never once looked behind him, and all at once dropped out of sight in such a sudden manner that I thought at first he must have gone through an opening in the pavement; but a little nearer approach showed me that he had only descended into one of those subterranean eating houses so common in all large cities.

I was upon the other side of the street, and when I reached a point about opposite to where my acquaintance had vanished, I dropped into a bellhanger's shop, which had a powerful smell of brass filings and onions, the latter odour no doubt percolating upward from the kitchen.

A grimy-looking man in his shirt sleeves answered the sharp ting-a-ling of the bell as I pushed the door open. He had shaggy eyebrows and enormous yellow whiskers, and surveyed me very keenly. Taking his station directly in front of me, he did not speak, but waited for me to ask my question.

"Can I get you to repair the gas-pipe of my house?"

He slowly shook his head from side to side, shut his eyes, and answered in a sleepy tone:

"I ain't in that business—'tain't in my line. You'll have to go to the plumber's and gasfitter's."

"Oh—ah! thank you."

I turned to go, but with my hand upon the door, paused, as if a sudden thought had struck me.

"A person wished me to inquire whether there was any property for sale in this street."

The man shut his eyes, slowly swayed his head from side to side, and answered in the same drowsy manner:

"Dunno of any."

He was on the point of moving away, when a dirty-faced urchin entered the room, and I took the occasion to present him with a few pennies, which at once conciliated the parent.

"My friend wishes to purchase a restaurant or eating-house. Are there any in this neighbourhood?"

"There's one just across the street," he replied, looking out of the window, "but I don't believe Dick wants to sell it."

"What Dick do you mean?"

"Dick Muggens."

"Has he any name for his place?"

"He calls it the 'Shades,' and does a pretty good business there."

"Does he own the place?"

"I think he does—ain't sure, though. He's made enough to buy it, if he wanted to, long ago."

"Do you think it a desirable property?—here, sonny, are a few more pennies—there is a good run of custom, I suppose?"

"Yes," was the hesitating reply, for the man was answering at random now. "You'd better go over and see Dick yourself."

"Thank you, I will. What did you say his name was?"

He pronounced it very carefully, and I have no doubt would have spelled it, had he possessed sufficient ability, without waiting for me to ask him to do so.

As may be supposed, during the conversation I was keeping a sharp look out for the Cuban. I saw him come out of the door, ascend the steps, and walk rapidly away, while I dallied in this aimless manner until I could make sure that the Señor was beyond danger of discovering me.

It was my intention to personate a gentleman in search of a restaurant, but the information I had gleaned from the bellhanger decided me to change my tactics and adopt a bolder course—one that incurred more risk, but, at the same time, offered the chance of greater success.

I walked slowly up the street until Almanaz vanished round a corner, when I crossed, and walked swiftly towards Mr. Muggens' restaurant, like one who was in a great hurry.

Stepping hastily down the steps I pushed open the door and found myself in an ordinary cheap restaurant, with a short, stumpy, red-faced man standing behind the counter, opening oysters. He and I were the only persons present.

"Good-day, sir," said I, as he looked inquiringly at me. "This is Mr. Muggens, I believe?"

"Yes, sir. What do you want?"

"You have a sick man in the house?"

The man stared impudently at me, and then demanded in a gruff voice:

"What's that to you?"

"Doctor Ruthven is unable to call, and I consented to look in upon him, in his place."

"Oh! be you the doctor?"

"I am somewhat in a hurry; I will look at him, and, if necessary, leave some medicine."

Mr. Muggens threw down his oyster-knife, wiped his hands upon a dirty serviette, and walked through a door behind him, I following close in his rear.

Up several winding stairs, through several filthy apartments, and he softly opened the door of a room, with the whispered remark:

"He's sleeping."

I controlled myself as well as possible, but I could not avoid pressing close upon him, and peering into the bed, where I caught sight of the form of a man.

"Good heavens!" I gasped.

"What's the matter?" demanded Muggens, turning rather fiercely upon me.

"Nothing at all."

No one can imagine my disappointment, as I scanned the features of the pale, sleeping man, and saw that it was *not* Fred Weldon!

Still, to carry out the part I had undertaken, I drew a chair up to the bed, and felt the pulse of the poor fellow, who, it was evident, was at the very door of death.

"I fancy you know the way out," said Muggens, after watching me for a moment. "There ain't nobody in the shop, so I'll go back, and you can follow yourself."

"Very well," I nodded, and the next moment I was left with the sick man.

"Can it be that I have been going astray all this time?" I asked myself, and stared absently round the room. "Is it possible that I have been led upon a false scent? Is my young friend indeed dead? Can it be——"

I paused, for at that instant I heard a slight movement in the adjoining room, and with a strange feeling I arose, and pushed open the door.

The apartment was precisely similar to the one into which I had been introduced. There was the low, narrow bed, and stretched upon it, worn to emaciation, pale, with his large, dark eyes wandering round the room, lay Frederick Weldon.

The poor fellow stared at me with the wondering look of a man whose senses are wandering, and it was plain that he did not recognise me.

Stepping hastily to his bedside, I placed my brandy flask to his lips.

"Drink! it will do you good!"

He obeyed, with the meekness of a child, and the hot fluid warmed him almost instantly into life.

"What is your name?" I asked, anxious to test him; but he made no answer until I repeated it several times.

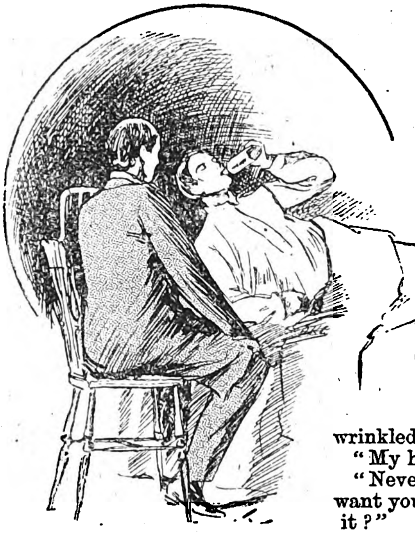
"My name; yes, my name is Weldon—Frederick Weldon, Counsellor-at-Law."

"That is right; I see a wound upon your head. How did you get that?"

"I don't know; yes—let me see. Someone struck me on the head last night, when I was walking towards the High Bridge. Here, I put it all down here; you will find it here."

And, reaching under his pillow, he brought a small blank book, in which I saw he had written a good deal in pencil. Placing it in my pocket, I said:

"I will read it when I go home. How do you feel?"



"Drink! It will do you good."

"I have been very ill, but your brandy has helped me. Give me some more, won't you?"

Another good draught, and he was visibly strengthened.

"Why doesn't mother come?" he asked, the next moment.

"She cannot very well do so just now. I came in her place."

"Who are you?" he asked the next moment, looking very earnestly at me.

"I am Adolph Squirrek, the detective, and your friend."

"Are you?"

A smile overspread his handsome face, but the next moment it vanished, and his forehead became wrinkled with pain.

"My head hurts me very much."

"Never mind; don't try to think, then; only I want you to promise me one thing. Will you do it?"

"I will promise you anything."

"Understand now what I say. There will be some other folks in to see you pretty soon. They will offer you medicine, but you mustn't take it. Do you understand?"

"Yes," was the feeble response.

"Do you promise me?"

"I will remember what you say."

"Don't forget; I will be in to see you again this evening, and am going to take you to your mother as soon as you are able to move. Remember not to take a drop of anything until you see me."

And with this parting warning I left him.

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caused by Indigestion, and all who suffer from this distressing and disfiguring complaint, should write to Dr. Howell, 22, Glasshouse Street, W., who guarantees a Cure in a few days.

MUCH BETTER THAN STEEL AND PENNYROYAL.

Ottey's Unlabelled strong FEMALE PILLS Quickly and Certainly remove all obstructions arising from any cause whatever. Invaluable for married women. Post free, under cover, for 14 and 33 stamps, from

THOMAS OTTEY, Chemist, Burton-on-Trent.
Please mention this paper.

RUBBER STAMPS
FREE BY POST.
AGENTS WANTED.
Liberal commissions.

Your Monogram, 2 letters, 1/2; 3 letters or Name in full, 1/8, including Box, Pad, and Ink, for Paper or Indelible Marking Ink for linen. All kinds of stamps. Illustrated Lists free.

S. S. IRETON & CO., Ltd.,
92, Gracechurch St., London, E.C.

GIVEN AWAY £5,000!

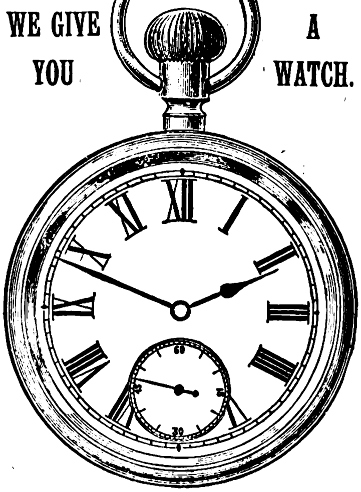
GRAHAM & CO.'S MONSTER GIFTS.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.—Messrs. GRAHAM & CO. intend to present their Customers with a Monster Parcel as a means of advertising their celebrated

EGYPTIAN GOLD JEWELLERY.

For the small sum of **6s. 6d.** we will send as follows:—

NOT A TOY



	Our Price.	
One Gent's Egyptian Gold Albert, or one Lady's Egyptian Gold Albert	2s. 6d.	FOR 6s. 6d.
One Seal or Locket for Chain	1s. 6d.	
One Gent's Carbon Diamond Ring, or one Lady's 5-stone Diamond Ring	3s. 6d.	
One Gent's Carbon Diamond Scarfpin, or one Lady's Fashionable Brooch	2s. 6d.	
One Pair of Cuff Links, or one Carbon Diamond Bracelet ...	2s. 6d.	
Total	12s. 6d.	

In addition to the above Every Purchaser will be Presented Free of Charge with one of our handsom

KEYLESS WATCHES.

USUALLY SOLD AT HALF-A-GUINEA.

Read what is said by those who have purchased.

WANTS A SECOND PARCEL.

Lowick-by-Neale, Northumberland, August 17.

"GENTLEMEN,—Received to-day your second parcel of jewellery, with which we are immensely pleased. We really wonder how you can do it. The watch itself is worth more than the money charged for the whole. Many thanks for punctuality.—Very truly yours, WILLIAM McISAAC.

GOES BETTER THAN HIS £15 WATCH.

11, North Street, St. Peters, Tunbridge Wells.

GENTLEMEN,—Some few weeks ago I sent to your firm for the jewellery and advertised watch, of which I am surprised; the *watch* is a beautiful timist. I must admit, in fact, it goes better than my £15 gold watch; and for the jewellery it is astonishing value. I think you must lose money over such gifts, as I term it. The watch alone is worth double the 7s. I enclosed. I have shown it to several of my friends, and they were astonished. You can add this to your testimonials if it will be of any service.—I am, Gentlemen, yours faithfully, LEWIS C. RHODES.

GUARANTEED TO KEEP CORRECT TIME.

Any Watch not received in going order will be exchanged.

Every Watch is Carefully Examined, Timed, and Guaranteed a Correct Timekeeper. Call and see them

We do this to save the enormous cost of advertising, preferring to give our customers the benefit. As we lose money on each parcel we cannot supply more than two parcels to one person. If you cannot call get a P.O. at once, and send for this wonderful parcel. Orders will be executed in Rotation. **MONEY RETURNED IF NOT AS REPRESENTED.**

NOTE.—The entire parcel will be sent for 6s. 6d. (post free, registered, 7s.). Each customer will receive gratis one of our HANDSOMELY ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUES. Be sure and call or send to-day for the

6s. 6d. Monster Presentation Parcel including the Handsome Keyless Watch.

◆ ◆ ◆

S. S. GRAHAM & CO., 277, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

TWO SERIAL STORIES, PROFUSELY ILLUSTRATED.

SHORT STORIES

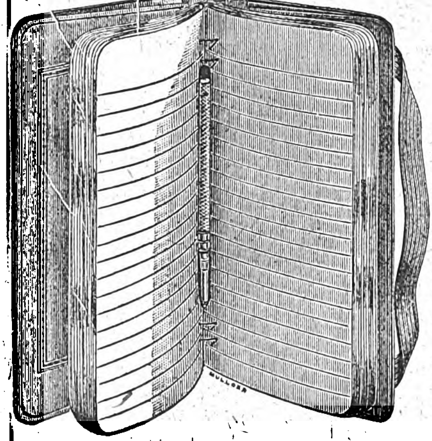
EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 346. FOR WEEK ENDING AUGUST 17TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

A GEOGRAPHICAL VIEW OF
A GLOBE=ULAR ANTIDOTE.

BEECHAM'S PILLS always BRIGHTON you up like a summer's BATH.
BEECHAM'S PILLS will lift you from the SLOUGH of despondency
BEECHAM'S PILLS make a bright EYE and a BLYTHE step.
BEECHAM'S PILLS will make you WARE like an IRON BRIDGE.
BEECHAM'S PILLS are good travelling companions wherever you may ROME.
BEECHAM'S PILLS bring a NICE complexion; take one during your IDLE moments.
BEECHAM'S PILLS should accompany FLORENCE and VICTORIA on their summer TOURS.
BEECHAM'S PILLS are known from TASMANIA to SPITZBERGEN.
BEECHAM'S PILLS have been over ANDOVER again admitted to be worth a NEW GUINEA a box.
BEECHAM'S PILLS should accompany every ship's CREWE, in case illness "springs a LEEK" on them.
BEECHAM'S PILLS will make your constitution as hard as FLINT or STONE.
BEECHAM'S PILLS find a NEW-MARKET and a NEW-PORT daily; their SALE is immense.
BEECHAM'S PILLS are decidedly calculated to bring a DEAL of benefit to you.
BEECHAM'S PILLS are grand nerve reposers when you cannot SETTLE.
BEECHAM'S PILLS are likely to exist as long as STONEHENGE.
BEECHAM'S PILLS have no BOURN, no limit, as to their effectiveness.
BEECHAM'S PILLS have invariably the power to take all the MOLD off you.
BEECHAM'S PILLS will make your spirits light as AYR and buoyant as a CORK.
BEECHAM'S PILLS will quickly take all the WALES and cries out of SYDNEY and ADELAIDE.
BEECHAM'S PILLS annual Sale of Six Million Boxes yearly surely LEEDS the way.
BEECHAM'S PILLS when you have ETON too free, or imbibed too DIEPPE, will right you at once.
BEECHAM'S PILLS truthfully MALAY claim to saving thousands of lives yearly.
BEECHAM'S PILLS are the best present for SUEZ handsome BOW when he is indisposed.
BEECHAM'S PILLS preserve you from the MENAI STRAITS a neglected system is subject to.
BEECHAM'S PILLS glide DOWN as pleasantly as a LONDON oyster.
BEECHAM'S PILLS never fail to cool the system when you BERNE with HITCHIN sensations.
BEECHAM'S PILLS will suit either MISSIS-SIPPI or MISS-OURI at home or travelling.
BEECHAM'S PILLS are pacific in their action; once tried you never TYRE of them.
BEECHAM'S PILLS will benefit either an ASIA MINOR or an adult AMAZON.
BEECHAM'S PILLS have the power of bringing you to a NEW-HAVEN of health.

COLLINS'
"AYE, READY!" NOTE-BOOK.
WITH PATENT "SELF-REGISTER."



THE HANDIEST
AND THE BEST.
THE SIMPLEST
AND THE
CHEAPEST.

As will be seen from the Illustration, this Note-Book has a hollow "rest" cut into the back, into which the Pencil falls and is securely held, while by means of an ingenious contrivance called a "Self-Register," the person using the Book can at once open it where he was last writing. A reference to any page in the front, the middle, or the end is also materially assisted by the "Self-Register."

In Leather Bindings, Round Corners, Gilt Edges, from 1s. upwards, or with Re-fills from 3s. 6d. to 10s. 6d.

WM. COLLINS, SONS & CO., LIMITED,
Bridewell Place, London, E.C.;
139, Stirling Road, Glasgow.

BLACKHEADS. I guarantee to cure the most stubborn cases when all else has failed. Book of particulars for an inexpensive, harmless, permanent, and certain home cure, post free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Mrs. V. EVANS, 18, Union Passage, Birmingham.

Advertisers should write for particulars of spaces to let in "Short Stories."

MASON'S
EXTRACT OF HERBS
For the Immediate Production of
BOTANIC BEER.

A Nine-gallon Cask of Alcoholic Beer from a Brewery will cost you 10/6, but Eight Gallons of Beer made from

Mason's
EXTRACT of HERBS

Can be obtained for 6d., plus a pound or two of Sugar and a little Yeast.

THE
FINEST BEVERAGE IN THE WORLD.

Inventors and Manufacturers:
Newball & Mason,
HYSON GREEN WORKS,
Nottingham.

If unable to obtain it in your neighbourhood, send 9 stamps for sample bottle; or samples of both Wine Essence and Extract of Herbs, post free for 15 stamps.

TOOTH-ACHE
CURED INSTANTLY BY
BUNTER'S NERVINE

Prevents Decay.
Saves Extraction.
Sleepless Nights Prevented.

Neuralgic Headache and all Nerve Pains Removed by BUNTER'S NERVINE. All Chemists, 1s. 1½d.

A BOON TO LADIES.

Collins' Marvellous Female Remedy.

Mr. COLLINS [who was 30 years a member of the Royal College of Surgeons of England] will forward, free of Charge, full PARTICULARS of a REMEDY, which during an extensive practice both at home and in the Colonies he has never known to fail in the most OBSTINATE CASES of OBSTRUCTION and IRREGULARITIES. Send addressed envelope for full particulars, and waste no more time and money on useless Pills and so-called Remedies, etc., which, in the majority of cases, are nothing but PURGATIVES, and cause SICKNESS, PROSTRATION, and PAIN, without having the desired effect.

Letters to be addressed—

D. COLLINS,
GOTHIC HOUSE, 9, ERSKINE STREET,
LIVERPOOL.

HAIR DESTROYED.

A lady who has permanently destroyed Superfluous Hairs on herself, will be happy to forward free, to all similarly afflicted, full particulars of a simple, inexpensive and harmless self-treatment. Send stamped addressed envelope in confidence to Mrs. "T. D.," 87, Strand, London.

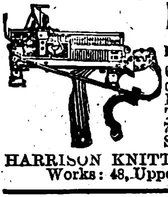
MADAME FRAIN'S
FAMOUS
FEMALE MIXTURE.

The most powerful and effective on earth.

For the most obstinate cases. Will not injure the most delicate. Price 7s. 6d. (Strongest, 11s. per bottle); post free, 6d. extra. HERBAL INSTITUTE, 1a, Hackney Road (opposite Shoreditch Church), London, N.E. Send at once stamped directed envelope for particulars and proofs. I will forfeit £100 for every testimonial that is not genuine, and they can be seen at any time.

Sold also by all Chemists.

New Harrison. SWIFT GOLD MEDAL.
KNITTER



KNITS STOCKINGS (Ribbed or plain) GLOVES and CLOTHING in WOOL, SILK, or COTTON. INSTRUCTIONS FREE. Lists free per post. 25 Triumphant Awards, including 7 Gold Medals for the "HARRISON" and "SUN" Machines.

HARRISON KNITTING MACHINE CO., Ltd.,
Works: 48, Upper Brook St., Manchester.

BLUSHING.

A lady, whose daughter was cured of this in less than a month, will be happy to send particulars to anyone inclosing stamped addressed envelope to Mrs. WILLIAMS, No. 1, County Chambers B., Martineau St., Birminghan.

ONE BOX OF
DR. MACKENZIE'S IMPROVED HARMLESS ARSENIC WAFERS

will produce the most lovely complexion that the imagination could desire. Clear, Fresh, freed from Blotch, Blemish, Coarseness, Redness, Freckles, or Pimples. Sent post free, 4s. 6d.

To whiten the hands and skin, use
Dr. Mackenzie's
Arsenical Toilet Soap.
1s. per tablet, 3 for 2s. 6d. Postage, 3d.

S. HARVEY,
Balham Hill, London, S W.

Beware of injurious imitations.

HAIR DESTROYED permanently and absolutely by an entirely new and harmless self-treatment; total destruction guaranteed. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope. Prof. F. T. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

HAIR DESTROYED.

Absolutely, permanently, painlessly (without extraction, or burning, or cutting off), and without injury to the skin, **or no charge made.** Inquiries confidentially solicited. Particulars and testimonials from hospital nurses and others, free. Address Mrs. E. GOULD, 129, New Kent Road, London, S.E.

RED NOSES

caused by Indigestion, &c. All who suffer from this distressing and disfiguring complaint should write to Dr. HOWELL, 22, Glasshouse Street, W., who guarantees a Cure in a few days.

ROMANCE
LOVE
ADVENTURE
WAR
HUMOUR
PATHOS

SHORT STORIES

No. 346.] [One Penny.

Edited by

C. Arthur Pearson.

For the Week ending August 17th, 1895.

Without Precedent.

“THINGS can't go on any longer as they have done,” was Ralph Eggleston's remark to himself, as, after a more than usually unsatisfactory *tête-à-tête* with his *fiancée*, Miss Marsh, he at length took his departure, resolving as he left the house that he would never visit it again.

The fact of the matter was Miss Marsh was an heiress in her own right, and realising her social importance, was somewhat exacting in her demands upon her lover, who, it is but fair to say, was no mere fortune-hunter, being a rising young barrister and possessed of a fair income of his own, so that his motives could not be regarded as purely mercenary.

They had met originally—he and Miss Marsh—at the house of a mutual acquaintance; had taken to each other, as the saying is, and in course of time the liking had extended into courtship, and when Ralph had proposed marriage the answer was a favourable one.

For a time after the engagement had been announced, all went pleasantly enough; but of late there had been more or less frequent bickerings between them, not the sort of lovers' quarrels which often tend to unite two young people more to each other in the end, but an amount of exaction on the lady's part against which the independent spirit of her lover rebelled.

At length things seemed to have arrived at a climax, as evidenced by the remark at the commencement of this story.

Having relieved himself by its deliverance, Ralph strode moodily along in the direction of his own home, when an inspiration suddenly seemed to occur to him, as he said aloud:

“And why not? A capital idea! I will give it a trial, anyway. To meet a woman who would really care for one would be to have new interest in life. There must be hundreds of girls in this city who would be only too glad to go in for a little innocent flirtation; it need not go any further than that. Anyway, I'll give the thing a chance,” and stepping into the office of a daily paper, he quickly wrote out an advertisement for the matrimonial column, paid for its insertion, and set out for home again, feeling well satisfied with himself at having done a satisfactory thing.

“It will be a delightful change,” was his mental comment; “that is, if I get any replies, and there should happen to be one amongst them from a really nice girl.”

On Monday morning he called at the office and presented his ticket, in case there were any answers to his advertisement.

Any answers, indeed! Why, there were a shoal of them, and it took him several hours to master their contents. There were letters from ladies in all ranks of the social scale.

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Some of them he threw aside contemptuously, after reading the first few lines, others he reserved for further consideration, finally deciding to reply to one signed Rose Attwood, the wording and tenor of which most appealed to him.

In due course he received an answer, whereupon he wrote, suggesting an appointment for an early date, naming as a rendezvous a spot where he did not anticipate he was likely to meet anybody he knew.

Punctual to time he put in an appearance there, only to find the lady awaiting him; to his astonishment, and no less agreeable surprise, she was a young girl of decidedly prepossessing appearance and ladylike demeanour.

"You got my letter," he stammered out; "I am R. E." He had given his initials only.

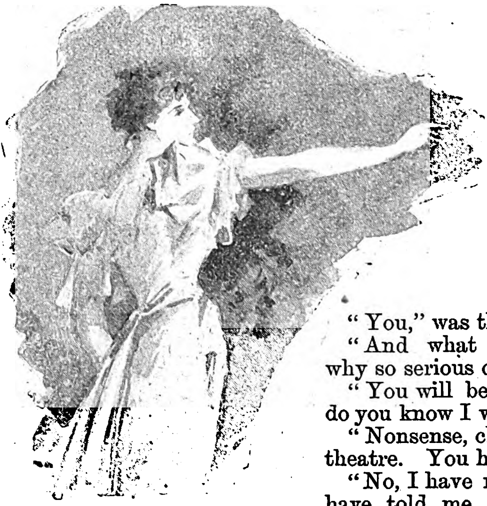
"Yes," she replied, with a becoming blush, "otherwise I should not have been here."

"Well, we can't stand talking here very well, what do you say if we go and have some lunch; I know a capital place not far off."

"Thank you very much," and they went.

The strange acquaintanceship thus formed rapidly blossomed into friendliness. Although always neatly and nicely dressed, Ralph soon discovered that Miss Attwood was by no means well off, and that to be taken about to theatres and other places of amusement, not omitting cosy little dinners before, or suppers afterwards, were delights to which she had never before been accustomed; and in this way the weeks sped into months without either being apparently aware of the flight of time.

Ralph had gathered that she supported herself as a music teacher, having left her home in the country to reside with friends in town, and from a casual remark she had made one day he had an idea she was, or had been, married, but whether she had a husband living or not never bothered him; he found her companionship an agreeable change to that of his *fiancée*, and that was enough for him.


An exacting lover.

She, on her part, had never sought to pry into his affairs in any way except what he told her about himself. She listened to him with interest, and what he did not care to tell her she evinced no anxiety to know.

On this convenient basis their friendship existed. They were, in fact, very good friends indeed, and as nobody but their two selves knew of their intimacy, there was no "Mrs. Grundy" to point out that they were living in a fools' paradise which could not very well exist for ever.

Strange as it may appear, Ralph had not broken off his engagement with Miss Marsh, and despite his resolution never to go to her house again, he nevertheless called there from time to time, although his demeanour had not much of the ardent lover about it. Not that this was likely to give his *fiancée* any great amount of uneasiness, seeing that she was not very much in love with him. They were going to be married some day, she supposed, and that was enough for her.

One evening when dining alone with Rose, an occurrence which came regularly two or three times a week, Ralph casually alluded to his engagement.

The colour left his companion's face as she replied:

"And are you really engaged to the lady you spoke of?"

"Well, I suppose so. She has never broken it off."

"And you will marry her some day?"

"Oh, I don't know. I might do worse. She is very rich, and I—well, I'm a poor man, comparatively speaking, you know. I have to work hard at my profession, and one doesn't want to slave away all one's life."

"No."

"Don't think for a moment I am nothing but a fortune-hunter. I really did like the girl once, but she's so hard to please."

"Do you try to please her?"

"Yes, honestly I do. For a long time I did everything I could think of to meet her wishes."

"And you failed to succeed?"

"That's so. She is so difficult to satisfy. Sometimes it's one thing, sometimes another—from politics to preaching."

"Is she what you call very goody-goody?"

"My dear girl, she's anything but that."

"Oh!" followed by a pause of some moments, during which Rose toyed idly with a spoon in front of her.

"What are you thinking about, my pet?"

"You," was the simple rejoinder.

"And what about me, little woman? And why so serious over it?"

"You will be marrying soon, I suppose, and—do you know I would like to go home now, please."

"Nonsense, child, why you are going to the theatre. You have forgotten."

"No, I have not forgotten, but after what you have told me, I would rather not go, thanks. Would you mind walking with me as far as our corner as you call it?"

It should be explained that in their various outings, the final farewell had invariably been spoken at the corner of a certain street where they always parted, Rose, on leaving, running along swiftly until she came to the steps of one of the flat houses, all exactly alike, that loomed solemnly in a row, then having turned round and waved her hand, she disappeared indoors.

She had told Ralph on the occasion of his first escorting her to the corner, that she wished her exact residence to remain unknown to him, and he was enough of a gentleman, having given his word, not to attempt to discover it.

"Good-bye, and thank you very much for all the kindness you have showered upon me, for which I am deeply grateful; but," with a choking sob, "I would rather not see you again, please;" and darting off, she had reached the house and run up the steps without so much as looking back, almost before Ralph had realised what her last words meant to him, or how fond he had become of her.

After standing motionless for a few moments he appeared to have come to some sudden resolution, and striding off the way he had come, hailed the first passing vehicle, telling the man to drive him to 301, Blank Street, the home of Miss Marsh and her mother. The former was in one of her "touchy" moods, and took him severely to task for not coming to see her oftener. Exasperated beyond all endurance, he at last blurted out: "Well, there's only one way I can see out of it. We had better get married as soon as possible."

Now, this was *not* quite what Miss Marsh wished for, and she endeavoured to temporise; but Mrs. Marsh happening to come into the drawing-room when the discussion was at its height, promptly settled the matter by deciding the date for them—six weeks hence—not wishing to lose her prospective son-in-law, who, if not equal to her daughter in the matter of wealth, was in every other respect a most desirable connection.

An hour after Ralph found himself on his homeward way, and inwardly blaming himself for having allowed his pique to get the better of his real feelings.

"I must see Rose once more, and then it will be all over, one way or the other. It would be a caddish thing to go and ask for her at this time of night. I'll write a letter. Fool that I am! I don't even know her address. No, but I know what I'll do: wait for her to-morrow as she goes out; she always gives a music lesson each morning about nine o'clock; she told me so herself."

Just before nine o'clock the following morning Rose appeared with her music portfolio under her arm. On seeing Ralph her colour visibly heightened, and she would have passed him by had he not interposed himself before her.

"Well, the damage is done at last."

"What has happened to you? Is it very bad?"

"Oh, no, quite the contrary, I suppose. I am to be married to Miss Marsh in six weeks from now; her mother has settled it all for us."

"Oh," said Rose, trying to smile, although she was now deadly pale.

"I suppose you don't care much," in a forced tone.

"I do, indeed."

"Well, it need not make any difference to us, need it? I shan't want always to be tied to my wife's apron string, and we can resume our pleasant friendship just where we left it off."

"It's wrong of you to say that, and you know it. Oh, but if things were only different!"

"If things were only different!" A light seemed to suddenly break in on him. "By heavens! they shall be; why was I ever so blind; you are worth a dozen of her, and I will tell her so to-day. Yes, this very minute." And before she could stop him, he was gone.

"Ralph, come back! please, come back!"

But if Ralph heard, he did not appear to.

"Mr. Eggleston called just now, mamma, and it's all over between us; this comes of your good-natured interference—not that I mind a bit; I never really cared for him, and it is his loss, not mine."

"What nonsense you talk, child. Mr. Eggleston has a great future before him, and he is a husband any girl might be proud of. Did he assign any reason, may I ask?"

"Only the usual conventional excuse—he had come to the conclusion we were not suited to each other."

"Fiddlesticks! there's a woman at the bottom of it, I'll be bound, and it will be my duty as your parent to find her out and expose him."

"Please do not trouble to do so on my account, he is not worth it."

Once more Ralph and Rose are together. This time it is evening, the time he knows she comes home from her afternoon music lesson.

"Thank goodness I am well out of it, and I shall never marry anybody now, unless," with a short uneasy laugh, "I could marry you, which is impossible."

"Why?" with a startled look on her face.

"Because you are married already, I believe; at least, you told me so."

"I have no recollection of the fact," was the demure reply.

"Do you really mean that?"

"Indeed I do. I am not twenty till next birthday, and I have never been engaged, let alone married."

"Oh! my darling, what an awful mistake I might have made; but it is not too late yet to repair it. Brute that I have been to you, Rose. May I hope that in time you may forgive me, and——"

"Please don't say any more; it can never, never be. I know I have been to blame quite as much, if not more so, than you have; I only answered your advertisement in a joke, but when I saw you, you were so nice and so respectful to me, and it was so dreadfully dreary and dull at home, and so pleasant going about with you, that I——"

"Oh! Rose, my darling! only hear me. I love you more——"

"No, dear, no! You may *think* you do, but you would never forgive yourself if you were to marry a girl who had so far forgotten herself as to answer an advertisement in a matrimonial journal. You have been very, very kind to me, and I shall always remember the happy hours we have spent together. And now it must be all over, please. Let us say good-bye once for all. Remember, you promised me once, as a gentleman, never to try and find out the number of the house I live at, and I shall expect you to keep to your word. Not that it would matter much, as I shall go away at once. And now, good-bye," and her fortitude having at length utterly broken down, she left him without another word.

Ralph's mind was made up without delay. He would remain where he was until he saw her again, all night and all next day as well if need be, for did she not say say she was going away.

All through the long night he paced up and down, and then just before the city was awakening into life his vigil was rewarded by seeing a maid servant emerge from one of the houses—*the* house he knew the position of so well—and, having obtained a cab from the nearest rank, return with it.

Presently one or two modest looking boxes were brought out and placed on the roof, and then, and not until then, did Ralph make up his mind what to do. Engaging the only other cab on the rank, he gave the driver instructions to follow and on no account lose sight of the laden one, giving him at the same time a substantial tip to accelerate his movements. On and on, through what seemed an endless number of streets, and then cab number one entered the terminus of a big railway station. There were not many passengers about so early in the morning, so that Ralph had no difficulty in keeping Rose in sight without himself being seen, and having ascertained her destination, obtained a ticket, and waited until the train was almost starting.

"Stand back there! stand back!" the guard shouted excitedly. But Ralph was not to be denied, and managed to get into the already moving carriage.

Before the journey was ended, his eloquence had not been wasted. At any rate, he said with a smile, as he helped his companion to alight, "I think we may safely say our love-making has been carried on in a style without precedent."

S. J. F. NEWBERY.

IT CAME TO PASS

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM

SUMMARY.

Charlotte, a young girl just out of the schoolroom, is married to Raymond Peel, widower, in his forty-fifth year, notwithstanding the knowledge that his past life has been a bad one. Entering London Society, she meets at Lady Logan's and elsewhere a young musician in whom she is much interested. Mrs. Donnington-Bain, an effusive American actress, calls on her husband.

CHAPTER II. (*Continued.*)

While the mysterious lady visitor related her adventures her eyes were riveted on the pale face of the man. He wore a troubled expression, and seemed ill at ease. The past, which had so nearly been forgotten, came back with a rush, and memories long dead woke afresh to life.

"You are to be congratulated," said Charlotte, coming again to the rescue.

"It isn't a bad life on the whole," declared Mrs. Donnington-Bain. "You meet a variety of people, and the perpetual change of scene is invigorating."

She ran her fingers up and down the silver cord outlining her scarlet bodice, and occasionally bit at her white veil.

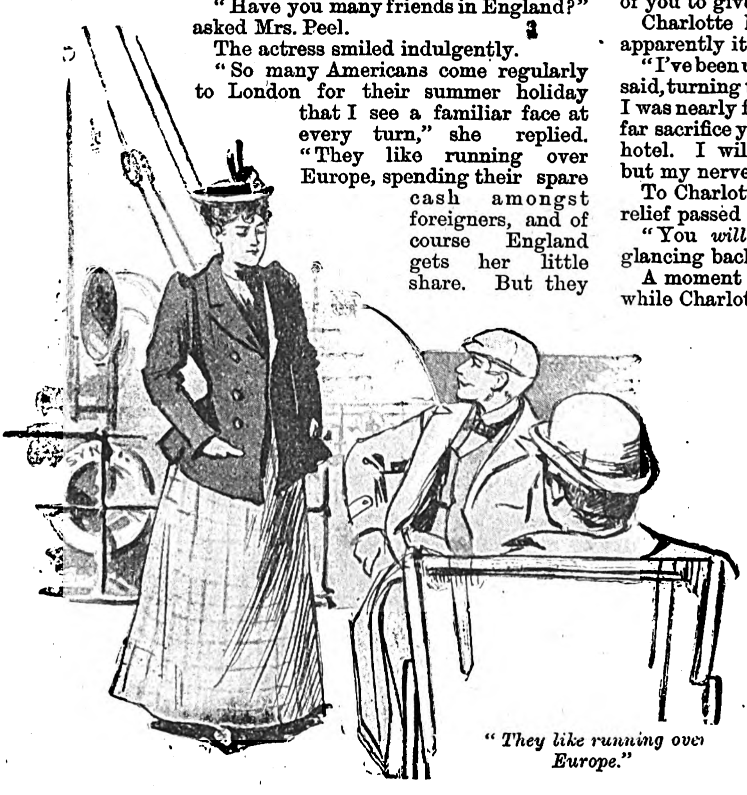
"You do not look a day older than when I saw you last, Augusta," Mr. Peel vouchsafed, after a pause.

She shot a grateful glance at him.

"Have you many friends in England?" asked Mrs. Peel.

The actress smiled indulgently.

"So many Americans come regularly to London for their summer holiday that I see a familiar face at every turn," she replied. "They like running over Europe, spending their spare cash amongst foreigners, and of course England gets her little share. But they did not make me forget your husband, Mrs. Peel—old friends rank first. It has been delightful seeing him, and when I am happy I cannot repress my feelings—I feel just inclined to hug you both!"



"They like running over Europe."

Charlotte devoutly hoped she would not carry out her threat, and palpably stiffened.

Mr. Peel cleared his throat, and was about to speak, when Mrs. Donnington-Bain sprang suddenly to her feet.

"Heavens! look at the time," she cried, pointing dramatically to the clock. "I only intended to fly here and see you for two minutes, just to let Raymond know I was in town—I shall be late for dinner! I am tired to death of dining, but it is one of life's most essential duties, and I never shirk it. But, oh! what indigestible dishes they give you in these English hotels, and always under the eternal glare of electricity. I like feeding by candle-light, for eating time is resting time with me. It is my only quiet hour. If I were under housemaid in a lodging-house I couldn't feel more fagged when I go to bed. Life's socialities are killing me!"

Charlotte smiled at her tragic tone, and submitted to a fond embrace.

"I must kiss you and wish you joy with this dear husband of yours," she said, squeezing her hand. "It was so sweet of you to give me such a cordial welcome."

Charlotte looked for a touch of irony in her tone, but apparently it was non-existent.

"I've been using my cousin's, Lord Northtown's, horses," she said, turning to Mr. Peel, "and they were so fresh coming that I was nearly frightened to death. I wonder if you would so far sacrifice yourself as to drive with me to the door of my hotel. I will promise not to detain you a moment longer, but my nerves are so unstrung after the voyage."

To Charlotte's surprise he assented readily, and a look of relief passed over his features.

"You *will* forgive me, Mrs. Peel?" she exclaimed, glancing back over her shoulder as he followed her.

A moment later they were side by side in the carriage while Charlotte stood alone in the deserted drawing-room.

Raymond Peel addressed the woman in a half whisper.

"Why did you not tell me you were coming?" he asked.

Mrs. Donnington-Bain gave a wicked little chuckle, and shrugged her shoulders.

"That was my whim!" she replied.

"I was simply on thorns. I suppose you were sharp enough to see that, Augusta?"

"Rather; but cheer up, old boy. I had no intention of giving you away."

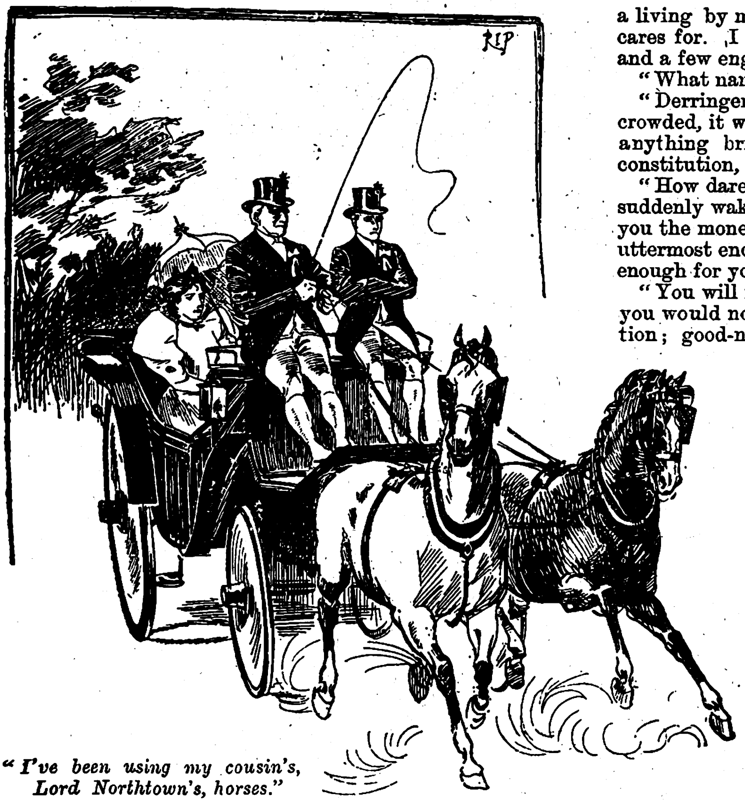
"Listen. My wife knows nothing, *absolutely* nothing, of the past. Not one word to her on the subject—remember that."

His voice, though low, vibrated with intensity.

"Of course," she answered, impatiently. "What do you take me for—a chattering schoolgirl?"

"Have you anything to tell me?" asked Raymond.

"Yes; Lynch is in England."



"I've been using my cousin's, Lord Northtown's, horses."

"This day is evidently destined to be one of bitter memories and unpleasant revelations. I wanted to wipe out the past, Augusta; but it's no good. The world is too small, far too small to hold us all."

"I did not wish to cast a gloom over your spirits, but you must learn to take things as they come. Try to be more philosophical—like I am, for instance. We have both known trouble in our day. I have been through the Bankruptcy Court and the Divorce Court. My husband is now sleeping with his fathers—he can no longer be the curse of wretched women. Then I have seen my nearest and dearest sentenced to death!"

A groan escaped his lips. He seized her arm, and dug his nails into her flesh. "For the love of Heaven spare me these reminiscences!"

Augusta's lips parted tranquilly in one of the saddest smiles he had ever seen. All her affectation disappeared, and for once she became natural.

"Forgive me," she murmured, with a little catch in her voice. "I have grown hardened and accustomed to disregard the feelings of others. By the way, Raymond, you have not asked after the boy."

He shuddered perceptibly.

"No," he muttered between his teeth; "I did not wish to."

"If I were not so disgracefully extravagant—and I cannot root out my darling sins now in my old age—I would do something handsome for him," she said.

"I have paid you the money regularly."

"Yes, yes; but you hate the very thought of him, and it is not likely you will double—or shall I say treble the sum?"

"No, by Jove!"

"And yet *I* love the boy."

Augusta's eyes drooped, but there was a false ring in her tone.

"He is in England with me now," she continued, "and I am trying to work him up a connection, that he may make a living by music. It is the only thing in the world he cares for. I have succeeded in getting him some pupils, and a few engagements."

"What name does he go by?"

"Derringer; Hugh Derringer. But the profession is so crowded, it would need a very optimistic mind to imagine anything brilliant resulting. Besides, he has a weakly constitution, and can work but little."

"How dared you bring him to England?" said the man, suddenly waking up to the fact of his injuries. "I gave you the money to keep him out of my sight, away at the uttermost ends of the earth. Have I not paid you interest enough for your trouble?"

"You will not see him," said Augusta, confidently, "and you would not know him if you did. This is my destination; good-night, Raymond. How cold your hand is! It chills me through my glove, yet the evening seems close and sultry."

"Yes," he replied. "I can hardly breathe."

"Good-night," she said again, and he re-echoed the words as he turned away.

"Good!" he muttered to himself, sardonically, "good! As if everything connected with this night was not evil."

"I never saw such a woman!" cried Charlotte, discussing Mrs. Donnington-Bain after dinner, "so loud and vulgar, my dear, and what golden hair! I dare say she looks lovely on the stage; large features show to advantage behind the footlights. Even from your study window I pronounced her dangerously handsome. The distance lent enchantment."

"Poor creature! She has seen some rough weather, and is much to be pitied. Her husband ill-treated and deserted her. That is enough to harden a woman at the outset."

Charlotte's eyes softened, as she crept into Raymond's arms.

"I won't say another word against her—I, who have such a good, devoted husband!"

"Leave out the first adjective," he replied, contracting his brows.

"No—*good* always to me. Do you remember, dear, before our marriage you made me promise never to mention your past life? You told me it had been 'a sad and a bad one.' Yes, those were your words, and you asked me if I were willing to take you under any circumstances. I said I would marry you if you were a murderer, with a list of crimes as long as my arm. I do not want to break my promise of silence; but I cannot bear to think of that strange Augusta having known you then, when I was not part of your life."

"Poor little woman! Do not worry your head over the follies and failings of an old man's youth."

"Old!" she laughed, fixing her eyes on the smooth, clear-cut face, which the hand of time had left unfurrowed. "You are only a boy to me! Now, if you come to talk of ancient people, look at that poor, decrepid creature with the grey beard, squeaking a wretched violin under the gas lamp in the street." She leant out of the window as she spoke, and threw him some money. "I wish," she said, with a sigh, "that I had a magic wand, and could transform the lame beggar into Hugh Derringer."

"*Hugh Derringer!* Where—where did you hear that name?"

It was with a strong effort that Raymond steadied his voice.

"Why are you surprised? He was the blue-eyed boy I fell in love with at Lady Logan's."

He bit his lip.

"I should like you to hear him play," she continued, eagerly. "May I give a musical party, and engage him for the evening?"

"No. Certainly not."

"That is decisive!" she replied, laughing at his stern tone. "I would delight in slipping a ten-pound note into his violin-case like Joseph with his brothers' sacks. He only asks a guinea, and it is not often he gets that. I call it sweating. Oh! Raymond, are you ill?"

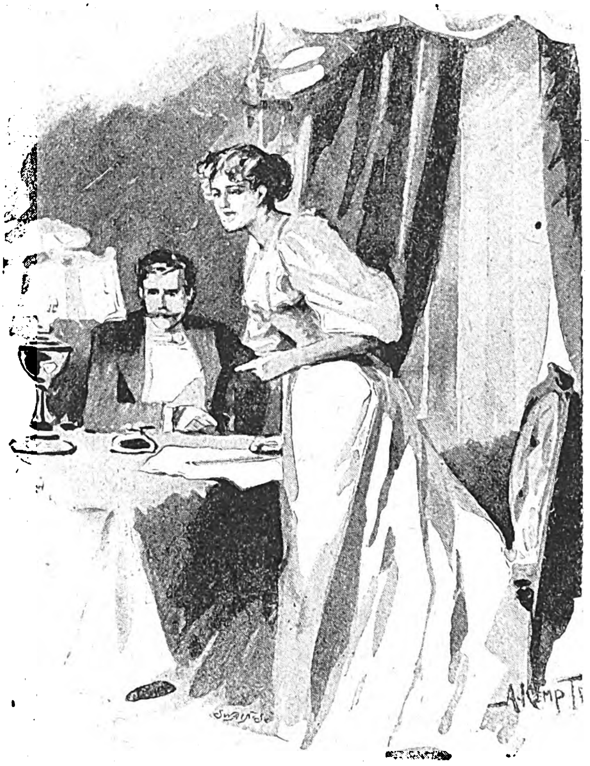
"Why do you ask?"

"Your face is so pale, and I felt your hand tremble in mine. Dearest, what is the matter?"

"I have rather a headache; it is very sultry to-night."

"Come and lie down and close your eyes. I will promise not to talk."

She drew him to the sofa. He felt glad to obey her, for his head was in a whirl. But the pain across his temples had no connection with the atmosphere without; it was caused by harrowing thoughts within, deep down in his secret soul.



"That is decisive," she replied.

CHAPTER III.

Mr. and Mrs. Peel had driven to Sandown. It was a lovely summer afternoon, and the first person they met was Augusta Donnington-Bain. Elaborately attired in purple, shot with peacock green, and surrounded by an admiring group of eminently frivolous young men, the actress planked her money down freely, and appeared in boisterous spirits.

"A la bonne heure!" she exclaimed, catching sight of Raymond in the paddock. "My predictions have been verified, for I counted on meeting you to-day. Mrs. Peel, why are you looking so serious? Have you been unfortunate in your selection of winners?"

"This is my first racing experience," replied Charlotte, frankly. "It is bewildering, and I am lost in contemplation."

"Then you have a lot to learn!" laughed Mrs. Donnington-Bain, glancing at the tall young figure with a sense of envy. "You have a great advantage over the *blasé* women around you; it is everything to be fresh in the pursuit of pleasure."

"Do you ever bet?" asked Charlotte, casting a suspicious glance at the actress's pencilled card.

"Such a question," declared Mrs. Donnington-Bain, turning to Raymond, "surprises one by its simplicity! If you want to start a charitable institution, Mrs. Peel, inaugurate a 'Distressed Gambling Ladies' Guild,' and I will apply for a pension on the score of having wasted more money on the turf than any woman in the world. Now, Raymond, are you going to escort me to the stand? Lady Logan is sweeping down upon us, and will keep you here for half an hour. She is like a New Woman let loose on a platform. My nerves become seriously affected in her presence, I assure you."

As she spoke Lady Logan's voice fell on Charlotte's ear.

"How are you, my dear Mrs. Peel—none the worse for this intolerable heat? I feel thoroughly shattered and exhausted, but *you* always look blooming."

With a sigh of relief Charlotte returned the greeting, while Augusta drifted away with Raymond.

"We came in quite a party on Harry's drag," continued Lady Logan, indicating her husband, "and I am sure I got sunstroke on the way down. Isn't it annoying for me? Two tiresome girls failed us at the last moment, and so now I have half-a-dozen men on my hands. It would be but christian charity to let me introduce them, Mrs. Peel. My head racks, and talking is torture."

Charlotte readily assented, glad to escape Mrs. Donnington-Bain.

"This is my old friend Dr. Lynch," said Lady Logan. "He has scarcely been in England a week, and we are making the most of his stay."

Charlotte inclined her head, and smiled graciously. She had a particularly fascinating bow. Dr. Lynch was very tall, very commanding in person, with an air of distinction, and clever, searching eyes. He smiled pleasantly in return, and made some casual remark upon the racing.

"So you have driven through all this dust and heat to see a few horses scamper past a post!" she said, glancing at the upright figure towering above her. He was a modern giant, she thought, with a very noble physique.

"On a day like this it is one of the prettiest sights imaginable to my mind," he replied.

"But there is something unwholesome in the excitement and anxiety," declared Charlotte. "It is only another form of speculation moulded into a pleasure afternoon."

"I am afraid you are too good for this world," he said, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Still, you are wise in your generation, for no vice clings faster than a passion for the turf. I have known it ruin many a rich woman, and yet, on the other hand, I met a sporting old lady who managed to live by it; but she preached the most dreadful doctrines."

His voice and manner pleased Charlotte; they were so frank and unaffected.

"Won't you say you are enjoying yourself in spite of this wicked diversion?" he murmured, as they wandered towards the lawn. "Let us sit here; there are fewer people, and the stand is crowded."

"How long are you staying in England?" she asked.

"Only a month or two, and it is my first holiday for years. I am doctor of a gaol in Sydney. It is rather a gruesome trade."

"Write a book on your experiences of gaol-birds. Poor creatures! I dare say you have reminiscences worth relating."

"Yes, had I the time or the energy."

For a long while they sat together, Charlotte both interested and amused by her new friend's conversation, while he was equally content with her society.

"She is altogether charming," was his mental verdict, Charlotte being a good listener. The art of listening is less common than the art of talking.

"I hope we may meet again," he said, with a certain fervour that surprised her, as she rose to go.

"I should like to introduce you to my husband," she replied. "He went into the paddock after the last race. Will you come and help me find him?"

"With pleasure. Strange to say I did not catch your name. Reade, wasn't it?"

"No, but here is my husband."

Looking up, he saw Raymond Peel standing before him with Mrs. Donnington-Bain. At the same moment Charlotte casually murmured an introduction. Her husband bent his head slightly, paling beneath the doctor's look of hatred, who neither bowed nor spoke, but glared into Raymond's face, which was white as death. Would that moment never end? There was an expression of unutterable loathing and contempt in the darkness of his eyes as Dr. Lynch turned sharply on his heel, slightly raising his hat to Charlotte, and was gone.

"Well!" declared Mrs. Donnington-Bain, "if that is not a straight cut," breaking into a short laugh. "It has given me a chill feeling of antiquity. He might have done the civil for the sake of my *beaux yeux!* Civility is cheap, but Lynch only indulges expensive tastes. Take me away—that man has disgusted me!"

Charlotte could hardly realise the insult offered to her husband. Her first sensation was horror that anyone should treat him with such terrible disdain. Then a sickening sense of dread suddenly overcame her, an instinct that all was not well with Raymond, as she looked up at him, a deadly fear knocking at her heart. Mrs. Donnington-Bain, sharply observant, was startled by the expression in Charlotte's eyes, having regarded her as cold, reserved, and incapable of feeling.

"What was the meaning of it?" she asked, clasping her hands together, and trembling from unusual excitement.

Her husband's lips quivered, and his eyes shifted nervously. He seemed at a loss for words. His marked reticence dismayed her, as Mrs. Donnington-Bain spoke with quick precision.

"It is quite an absurd story," she said. "Dr. Lynch and Raymond quarrelled over some land in that wild and savage country we call Australia. The doctor made himself ridiculous, and went to law about it. He was mad at losing the case, and has cut his adversary ever since."

Charlotte appeared only half-satisfied with the explanation, for the doctor's manner had frightened her, and she was watching Raymond's face. Already she dimly suspected some unknown shame and disgrace.

"Come, it is time we went," he said.

The thought of a dark irrevocable past of which she must never speak rose up now spectre-like before Charlotte, while her face blanched at the remembrance of the insult she had witnessed.

"Good-bye," she murmured, giving her hand to Mrs. Donnington-Bain, with a smile plainly covering a heavily-burdened heart.

As Charlotte turned to follow her husband, she found herself facing Lady Logan.

"Going already, Mrs. Peel?" she cried. "Shall we meet at the Wilson's to-night?"

"No, I'm afraid not. Raymond does not like musical evenings."

"But if you have no other engagement, do come with me. It is a great mistake to stay at home, and you can easily send your husband to the club. May I call for you at half-past ten? Hugh Derringer is going to play."

"I should love to hear him," said Charlotte, trying to speak lightly. "But are you well enough?"

"My dear, I never let a headache interfere with existing arrangements, or I should not be here to-day. That is one of my little perversities."

"Is Dr. Lynch going?"

"No; he has a Freemason's banquet to-night, and will speechify till the early hours. He has robbed me of Harry's escort, so let us be grass widows together."

Involuntarily a sigh of relief escaped Charlotte.

"Didn't you find Dr. Lynch delightful?" asked Lady Logan. "Nobody could be dull in his society. He is such a dear creature!"

"Do you think so?" speaking coldly.

"Yes; but I see you don't agree with me."

"He has no manners," Charlotte explained, with a pitiful glance towards the retreating figures of Augusta and her husband. "Good-bye. I will come to-night."

"Do not fail me!" cried Lady Logan, waving adieu. "You must not let Mr. Peel grow fogeyish. Oust him when he suggests a quiet evening at home, there is nothing better for the nerves than life, gaiety, and movement."

Hugh Derringer had so strangely interested Charlotte that she could not resist the temptation of accompanying her friend that evening.

"It will divert my mind," she thought, "and I must try to drown annoyance in dissipation."

So, determined to shake off her worries, she sought the silver lining to her cloud, and as Raymond would give her no further information concerning Dr. Lynch, ceased questioning him, and endeavoured to forget the unpleasant incident.

Being cheerful by nature Charlotte decided to enjoy the evening, and found herself once again listening to the young violinist with the sad eyes.

"He is one of my charities," Lady Logan informed her. "I champion his cause pecuniarily."

Determined to renew her acquaintance with Hugh Derringer, Charlotte found him after his performance in a deserted boudoir, leaning against an open window, alone, and meditative.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked, coming gently behind him, unobserved.

He started visibly.

"You have not forgotten me?" she said, holding out her hand.

"No," he replied. "I could never forget your kind words of encouragement; but I fancy if I answered your question my thoughts would somewhat surprise you."

"Then may I be surprised?"

"I am speculating on my own identity—what I am, and whence I came. You see before you merely a waif and stray—just a spar of wreckage on life's shore."

"But rich in genius," she interpolated. "No mean inheritance!"

"Yet I am more forlorn than you imagine, for I know nothing of my parentage. I doubt if I was ever born!" with an attempt at a smile. "I believe I was invented."

Some intonation in his voice brought Raymond to her mind.

"Can it be possible that you are entirely ignorant of your origin, nameless, in fact?"

He bowed his head.

"But how were you brought up?" she asked, with sympathetic interest.

"A beautiful woman adopted me, a stray child from the workhouse, and treated me as her son. She was not rich, yet never repented her generosity. Remarkably self-sacrificing, wasn't it, Mrs. Peel?"

"Then why do you speak so bitterly of her?"

"Because in reality she is neither charitable nor good. Why, then, did she burden herself with the care of a child? Children I have more recently discovered are her greatest aversion. I can conceive no other reason for the so-called act of benevolence, than that I am her son, and she is ashamed to own me."

His words were checked by a low, deep cough that shook the slender form, and contracted the muscles of his face with pain.

"How ill you seem!" said Charlotte, whose heart ached for him.

"It is down here in my chest," he replid, apologetically; "and my throat is weak—relaxed, you know. It hampers me with my work."

"Would you mind shutting the window?—I am cold," she declared, shuddering to think he had been breathing the night air. "I suppose," she continued, "that I ought not to ask the name of the lady who adopted you?"

"She makes no secret of it, and, even if she did, I could trust *you* before all the world."

"On what authority?"

"My natural instinct, which has never played me false."

"And her name?"

"Augusta Donnington-Bain."

Charlotte stared at him dumfounded, with a certain fervour of conviction. That look which seemed so strangely, horribly familiar to her, what might it not mean? Her eyes were blinded by a mist—she could see nothing, and the room swam round.

During the momentary pause a graceful woman in white entered the boudoir.

"Will you oblige us with some more music, Mr. Derringer?" she said, not pausing for a reply, since he was paid to wait upon her pleasure.

"Give me your address," murmured Charlotte, faintly. "Or are you at Mrs. Donnington-Bain's hotel?"

He smiled at her question.

"Oh, no! I have a room over a baker's shop. It is not romantic."

Charlotte shuddered as she took his card.

"Thank you," she said. "Good-night."

"Why are you going so soon, Mrs. Peel?" asked Lady Logan. "You look very pale. I hope you are not ill."

"Oh! no; only tired."

"Has General Wilson been fatiguing you with his endless comments on science and politics?"

"I have been studying the science of sciences —humanity!" replied Charlotte.

"No doubt you made some excellent investigations, well worthy of solution! Remember me to that nice husband of yours, my dear, and bear in mind that rest and sleep are advantageous to the young. I am old, and will, therefore, wait for a skirt dance and a French recitation."

With her mind in a whirl of mingled feelings, Charlotte sought solitude. Though trembling at her own thoughts, she still hoped they might be due to an over-wrought imagination. Until her doubts were proved not a breath of suspicion should fall upon Raymond, and so she drove sadly home, shutting her sorrow away in her heart. Till daylight dawned she lay sleepless and miserable, trying to deaden the anguish of her soul, but the darkness into which her wide, open eyes stared was peopled by visions of ghastly possibilities.

She rose late, painfully conscious that her struggle to live these suspicions down had ended in failure.

Raymond noticed Charlotte avoided him, but could not account for her manner. The crushing blow of the previous evening seemed to have frozen her. Once or twice when he addressed her she was conscious of a deep flush on her cheek, while her answers were short and hurried. There were dark lines, too, under her eyes, and her expression was strained and hard.

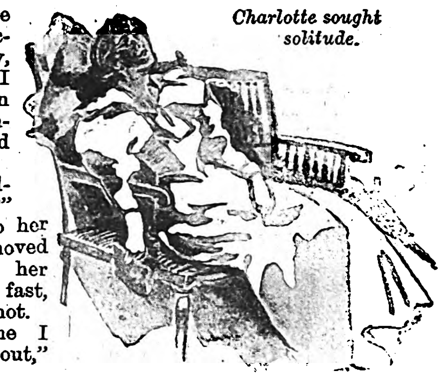
"What are you going to do this afternoon?" he asked.

"Drive, most probably," she replied, with a slight intonation of uneasiness.

She crossed the room and opened the piano, as though to avoid further conversation.

"Then do not expect me back before dinner," he said, after a pause.

"Very well. I have several calls to pay, and much else to think of."



Charlotte sought solitude.

"Why are you so pre-occupied to-day, Charlotte? I have never seen you more constrained and quiet."

"Must I be always laughing?"

He came to her side, but she moved away quickly, her heart beating fast, and her face hot.

"It is time I dressed to go out," she said.

Raymond did not pretend to understand women, and he supposed the fatigue of the season was affecting Charlotte's temper. She was pale with anxiety as she drove off in her brougham, leaning back with a sense of prostration, her hands clasped in nervous weakness on the unopened book in her lap. Presently the horses drew up before a baker's shop, where she alighted, and entered with faltering steps.

"I have come to inquire for Mr. Derringer," she said. "He seemed unwell last night."

"It was a chilly evening for July," replied the woman behind the counter, shaking her head solemnly, "and the young gentleman was not fit to be out of his bed then, with the weather so changeable, too—one day cold and the next 'ot. He looked real bad when he came in, so I sent for Doctor Potts. It's the consumption, ma'am, but 'e won't take no care of 'isself, and 'im such a nice young gentleman —a *real* young gentleman!"

She pressed a dirty duster to her eyes, and sniffed ominously.

"Is Mr. Derringer at home now?"

Charlotte's voice shook slightly as she spoke.

"No, lady—no," continued her informant, with a long-drawn sigh. "I only wish 'e were. The doctor told 'im to stay in bed, but 'e's gone off to give a lesson in Terra Cotta Villas."

"Then give me the doctor's address," said Charlotte, in a calm deliberate tone, suddenly making a resolve.

"Yes, ma'am; 23, Southampton Gardens. Doctor Potts thinks as it's the sooty air what's got in 'is lungs. The rain was coming down 'ard last night, but 'e just didn't seem to notice it."

Charlotte waited to hear no more, but drove straight to Dr. Potts, from whom she received a very grave report. If Hugh Derringer remained in London he could not be expected to live, and the only chance of saving him was an immediate change.

As she left the doctor's house Charlotte decided to consult her husband upon the mystery of Mrs. Donnington-Bain's adopted child, and seek his advice as the surest means of getting at the truth. She let down the brougham window, and gazed out with a stony stare, as one accustomed to commanding emotion.

Suddenly her eyes fell upon a man on the pavement.

Though confusion all but took her breath away, Charlotte's first impulse at sight of him was to stop the carriage. Dr. Lynch had seen her, and, acting on a swift determination, she pulled the check string. His consternation was evident, as Charlotte, feeling terribly conscious, addressed him with a desperate effort. Already she was covered with vexation at her hasty act, but it was too late to draw back.

"I want to speak to you, Dr. Lynch," she began, hesitatingly. "Will you drive with me a little way, that I may have an opportunity?"

Keenly alive to the awkwardness of the situation, Dr. Lynch sprang into the carriage, and seated himself with a sense of incongruity at her side.

(*To be continued.*)

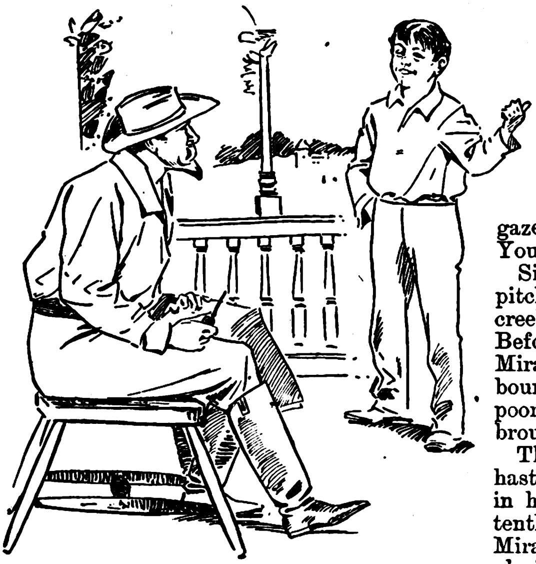
THE MAN WHO WAS REALLY GREAT.

By G. B. Burgin.

(*Author of "His Lordship," etc.*)

I.

Silas Hubbard was a sublimely, heroically great man. He maintained this point himself on many a hard fought political field; and if one cannot believe such a personal statement, then some of the world's so-called heroes have lived and lied in vain. Four Corners folk knew that Silas meant what he said; if they failed to realise his meaning, he reluctantly supported it with revolver shots. To use a technical illustration, he was accustomed to "lead out"—with his revolver—the intervening spaces when anyone presumed to doubt his veracity. As he lived alone (save for the society of his beautiful daughter, a girl of thirteen) on the brink of the swamp, his audiences, though select, were generally small; but there was always the mitigating consolation of the post-office within a quarter of a mile; and there Silas Hubbard could hold forth on most subjects, secure of the silent sympathy of Constable Wrong, who received a free copy of the *Four Corners Gazette* every week, and felt morally bound to support the editor's opinions in return for so munificent a gift.



"You run this thing?"

Soon after Silas had bestowed this great boon on Constable Wrong, *The Gazette* secured an addition to its staff in the shape of a boy of thirteen, who burst through the Bush at the back of the house, one evening, nodded slightly to Silas, and made himself very much at home on the verandah. His deeply-set dark eyes shone out beneath penthouse brows, and his chin had a cleft in the centre. One bleeding toe appeared through his boot; the left foot lacked a sole; and his general appearance suggested that a bath would not be an inappropriate or superfluous step.

Although the snow had but recently gone, the brief Canadian spring clothed every inch of ground with swiftly-growing blades of grass. Already myriads of mosquitoes pestered the sleek kine as they emerged panting from the Bush and slowly sought the village, their swollen udders craving the customary pressure of human hands. Fire-flies flickered through the long grass, or faded away into the dewy dusk of oncoming night, whilst the musical monotone of the never-satiated little sawmill in the creek, as the "night-shift" came on, and the circular-saw ate its way through monster tree-trunks, mingled with the roar of the Falls and the faint lap-lap of the river. The village itself was situated parallel to the river, and consisted of one row of wooden houses, a disused and dismantled fort—sole remnant of the time when the red man was feared in the land—a Presbyterian church with a tin spire, ten taverns, a court-house and gaol in one, six stores, and a rough stone Catholic church with painted windows on which the setting sun shone redly down.

The boy comprehended the village with one glance. "You run this thing?" he queried. pointing in the direction of the printing office. (A tame turkey, with literary tendencies, was making a light supper off the broken types which strewed the ground, whilst a long-bearded, patient-looking goat tried to digest a tin tomato-can containing printers' paste). Silas was taken at a disadvantage, and stammered "Ye-es."

"I'll stay," said the boy. "Guess I can run you in some new wrinkles. Don't mind thanking me. Got any pie about. Genuine pie, not printers'."

"Maybe," sarcastically said Silas, "you'll join the staff and edit me."

The boy fixed a frank gaze on him. "Guess I will. You need it badly—with a razor."

Silas's first impulse was to pitch his unbidden guest into the creek at the back of the building. Before he could carry it out, Miranda appeared bearing a most bounteous provision of pie. "The poor fellow's starving, Dad. I've brought him some of my pie."

The hot-headed adventurer's hasty answer died away unspoken in her presence. He gazed intently, not at the pie, but at Miranda's beautiful blue eyes, the glorious masses of black hair which hung over her head and shoulders, and noted the proud curve of the girl's upper lip, her gleaming teeth and dimpled chin, not cleft like a dint in granite after the fashion of his own. She wore a frock of grey homespun, on her head a red ribbon; in her hand was the platter heaped with pie. As the boy's eyes dropped, hers fairly danced with fun and the consciousness of coming empire, the proffered pie remaining between them in mid-air.

"Eat," said the girl, shyly, her long lashes dropping in their turn.

The boy mechanically took the plate. "May I ask what place you hold in this house?"

"You want to edit Dad," replied the girl: "I'm going to edit you as a punishment for your impudence."

Silas grimly regarded them. "She'll do it, my boy. Better go away—you're welcome to the pie—and chop wood."

The youth's retort was scarcely warrantable. He looked apprehensively at the pie on his plate. "Did you make it?" he murmured.

"Yes," the girl faltered, with a sense of fearsome guilt lying suddenly on her soul.

"Show me the heroes of a nation," said the youngster, taking a huge bite out of a slice—"Show me the heroes of a nation, and I will show you the men who have managed to survive the ordeal of home-made pie."

"Does it disagree with you?" faltered Miranda.

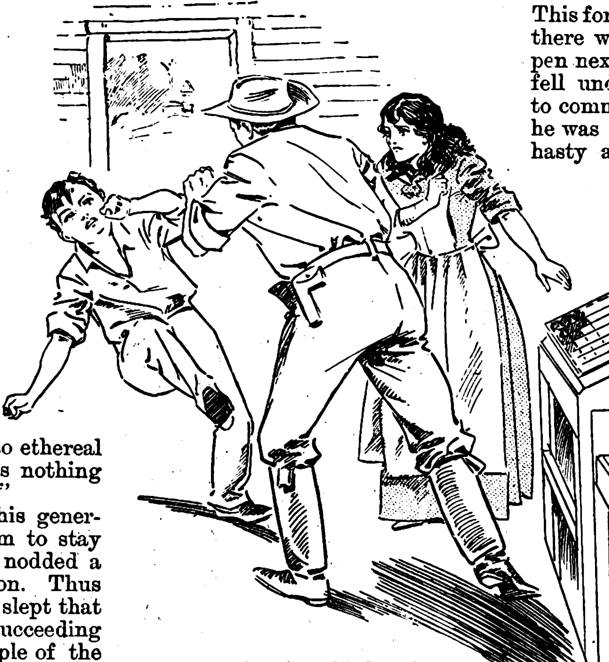
"Not yet." The young fellow looked at her critically. "Confess now, and I will absolve your soul. Didn't you say to yourself this morning, 'To-day I will arise and make my first pie and try a piece of it on father.' Didn't you, now?"

"Ye-es."

"As the day drew on, and you knew what you had deliberately put in that pie, you hesitated. In the heat of the noontide you could doom your father to destruction; but as the calm shadows of night fell about this peaceful home your purpose failed you. You said, mindful that this white-headed man is your father, 'My soul shall be spared so monstrous a crime. I'll try it instead on the first tramp who comes along.' Can you deny it?"

"You know I can't."

"Well, you needn't (he took another bite out of the pie). So far, it is a very good pie—very good indeed. I don't remember to have partaken of so ethereal a pie for weeks. There is nothing at all paleolithic about it."



With one blow from his leg-of-mutton fist.

The girl, mollified by this generous compliment, asked him to stay for the night, and Silas nodded a surly assent to her invitation. Thus it was that Fergus Crane slept that night and for many succeeding nights with the faint ripple of the wandering Ottawa river in his ears, and the sweet west wind, laden with piny odours, blowing softly through the open lattice as the stars peered solemnly over the tree-tops into his little room.

But after that first meeting Silas lost all faith in this pretentious boy, who knew so much more about the way to manage a newspaper than he himself did. Silas would not admit, what everyone else shrewdly surmised, that jealousy was the dominant reason for his dislike. Miranda loved the boy; he was her constant companion and delight; her father held the second place in her heart. The night which brought Fergus such peaceful repose occasioned Silas nothing but the saddest unrest. He loathed the very sight of the lad, although for more than a year there was no open manifestation of their mutual dislike. Moreover, on one or two occasions Silas felt a glow of almost parental pride in Fergus's ability when a more than usually trenchant article from the pen of that truculent youth had aroused a desire on the part of Four Corners' folk to lynch the legally-responsible head of the concern. Fergus, however, regarded the matter as a joke, boldly avowed the authorship of the article, borrowed a big shot-gun, and expressed his willingness to receive a committee of any six citizens, with or without revolvers, to discuss the question, provided they would permit him to open the argument. The lad's laughing defiance had the desired effect, although many leading citizens went about vowing that he was not destined to die in his boots.

Miranda vainly did her best to mend matters. Then something occurred which might have been foreseen by anyone but Silas, who was always ready to under-estimate the personal charm of this waif from the Bush—a charm which, in spite of his jealousy, often made him wish that Miranda had been born a boy with all Fergus's tremendous dash and obstinacy. When Fergus stated that he was about to do something, it was generally done. Silas had a dim prescience that the boy could revolutionise the universe if he chose to set about it. This foreknowledge made him uneasy; there was no telling what might happen next. One day, the thunderbolt fell under his nose, and caused him to commit an act of brutality of which he was ashamed afterwards when his hasty action could not be remedied, and Miranda, for the first time in her life, ceased to think that her father could do no wrong.

One summer evening about fourteen months after Fergus's arrival at the Four Corners, Miranda was in the printing office talking to him. The turkey—it weighed four or five pounds more, owing to its constant accumulation of broken type—which was a disinterested spectator from the doorway, noticed that Fergus's arm was round Miranda's waist. "I'm going to marry you," he said, flinging back his handsome head; "but I shall never make money enough to do it here. Besides, every night the river calls me: 'Come away into the world. You're a stranded log here. Come and taste the world's delights. There's Fame in the world—and Fame is good; there's Love in the world—and Love is good; there's Wealth in the world—and Wealth is good; they all wait for you. Get up. Seek them. Taste them. They're not here, save Love; the world passes this place by as it passes the monks of La Trappe at Two Mountains. Don't ripen and rot here. Come!'"

Miranda drew without the shelter of his arm. "Go. I don't wish you to stay; you would only break your heart and hate me. Come back some day; you've promised. Bring your world with you, lay it at my feet; I shall decide whether to pick it up. But I will be second nowhere. Go to your world, embrace her, weary of her; then come back and ——", she laughed—"tell me whether you prefer her to me."

The lad drew her to him. "You are right. Some day

I'll bring you the world—as much of it as I can carry, at least—or (he pointed to the moon as it sailed over the pine tops) would you prefer that?"

The girl stretched up her pretty hands to it with a longing gesture. "It's as yellow as gold, but, ah me! how lonely to be up there with only the little stars."

"Ah, but they look at it."

"The moon doesn't want to be looked at unless ——"

"Unless?"

"She can look back at her peer."

The boy kissed her. "I will remember that."

"And this," cried a furious voice, as Silas smote him to the floor with one blow from his leg-of-mutton fist.

The boy bounded to his feet and laid hold of an iron crowbar as Miranda rushed between them. Then he laughed lightly, tossed the bar into a corner, and wiped away the dust from his face. "I've eaten your pie, or I'd kill you."

Silas walked to the door. It hurt him that Miranda should shrink away as he passed. "Git," he said, relapsing into the vernacular of his boyhood and utterly disregarding the laboriously-acquired grammatical culture of half a century. "Git out of this. I don't want to see your face agin."

The boy laughed and kissed Miranda. "I can catch the night-boat for Montreal. Look out for me, Miranda. I'll return and bring the world with me."

He ran hastily up to the garret, emerged with a bundle containing his few goods and chattels, waved one hand with gay good-nature to Silas, who was too proud to bid him stay, and turned towards the wharf after again kissing Miranda. "Don't you hear the night-boat coming? the churning of her paddles? the roustabuts' cries? Those old screech-owls, the Fates, are whistling for me; the river's calling 'Come!' Remember, Miranda, if anyone but yourself uses my garret I'll never forgive you. It's going to be a show place at a dollar a head some day. Good-bye; good-bye." And he set off at a run, as the boat fussed up to the wharf and the deck-hands began to dump down apple barrels with lightning-like rapidity.

Miranda gazed after him through a mist of tears, passed her father without a word, and entered the house.

An hour later Silas went to Miranda's door to bid her good-night, but she was not there. He climbed to the garret and looked in.

Everything was strewn about. Miranda had moved her dainty belongings up the rough stairs, and was arranging them one by one. He would have remonstrated, but a glance at her firm-set features and resolute chin deterred him from all speech. Once Silas awoke in the middle of the night. It seemed to him that he heard someone sob away up in the roof. He stuffed his fingers in his ears, resolving to follow Fergus Crane to Montreal in the morning and entreat him to return.

But when Silas carried out his intention there was no tracing the lad. He had not been to any of the city printing-offices; no one knew anything about him. Miranda greeted Silas affectionately on his return.

"You've done all you could, dad. You never heard Fergus say a thing he didn't carry out, did you?"

"N-no, can't say I have," answered the old man. "Sorry I hit him."

"You'll be sorrier for it some day when he brings me the world."

The old man sniffed. "What!"

Miranda smiled. "He'll bring me the whole world or—nothing!"

"Guess he'll find nothing easier to carry," said Silas, turning away to the pump.

II.

Miranda waited the traditional seven years for her world, but without getting it. During these seven years she became a beautiful young woman much sought after by the gilded youths of the Ottawa Valley. Her father sometimes taunted her after the manner of the heathen when railing at a Christian's god. "Perchance he sleepeth or tarrieth in strange lands, seeking a lever wherewith to raise the world." Then the old man would become more colloquial and lament Miranda's infatuation for Fergus Crane. From time to time he read her extracts from English papers, showing the great growth in reputation of one Sylvanus Tree, who had taken the literary world by storm with an insolent confidence which almost courted disaster. "Now, if that fellow Crane had had the gumption of this chap," the old man declared, "he might have made a living, and brought you back something worth having. That's the sort of man I like. Now, listen while I read you the opening chapter of his great story, 'Why Did She Do It?'"

Miranda put her fingers to her ears. "I won't! I won't! I won't!" she said. "I don't care what she did or why she did it. I know she oughtn't to, anyway. If Fergus has been unfortunate you ought to pity him, not jeer at his failure when you know his success is everything to me. I mean to marry him whether he succeeds or not. I hate that man Tree's stories, although I've never read them. I'm sure he's cruel and bumptious, and doesn't deserve success."

Silas doggedly turned over the paper, readjusted his spectacles, and continued to read. Presently he looked up. "I'll eat my hat if that fell—hulloa!"

A bronzed, footsore, dusty, dirty tramp came limping out of the Bush just in the same way that Fergus Crane had done more than eight years ago. A fierce moustache hid his mouth, his cheeks bristled with a three days' beard, his clothes were tattered; in short, a timid man passing this tramp in a city would have thrown him alms, a country farmer would have let loose his dogs, a merchant locked up his wares. Miranda's heart leapt within her. Her hero had returned defeated, dirty, footsore, yet indomitable as of old. She felt ashamed of her dainty and delicate summer dress, with its pretty ribbons and billowy waves of muslin. Ought she not to descend from the verandah, don her coarsest garb, stand beside him, and attune her circumstances to his, lest he should think that she condemned him for being defeated in the battle of life?

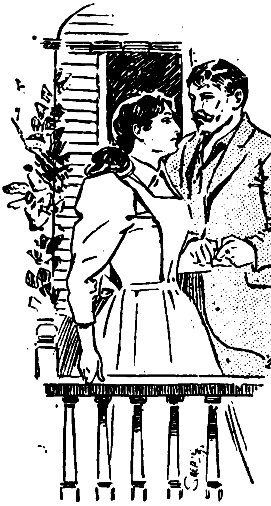
Fergus halted, cast a quizzical look at Miranda, and—waited.

Moved by some magnetic force in Miranda's glance, Silas grunted a surly welcome. "Got the world with you?" he asked, "or left it down on the wharf?"

Miranda's hand was on the old man's lips before he had finished speaking. Then she turned to Fergus, who stood comically and shamelessly holding out a bronzed paw, and put her slim, cool fingers in his. "Sit down here a minute, and I'll have your old room ready for you. No one but myself has used it since you left home."

She slipped hastily away into the house, leaving Fergus Crane and Silas sitting just where they had sat so many years ago, with the exception that directly Miranda disappeared Fergus lost his somewhat jaunty air. He seemed fatigued, disappointed, faint of heart. "I reckon I talked too tall," he said, tickling his bristly chin with the end of a long grass.

"The old place is open to you—you and your world!" said Silas, continuing to read with secret annoyance. It was a disappointment to him that the armour of youth had been stripped from this once dashing free-lance, who was now little better than a broken-down tramp. Only success could justify Miranda's attitude towards Fergus Crane; and Fergus Crane was not clad as a man who has succeeded; he did not come with costly jewels on his fingers, in his mouth an expensive cigar, on his feet the shiny patent-leather boots beloved by millionaires. There were no servants to obey his slightest nod, no regal piles of trunks to be brought up from the wharf. No; the man was just a broken-down, wandering printer, who had, doubtless, an unlimited power of drinking whiskey; and not even Miranda could inspire him to attempt anything better. Miranda would marry Fergus—that was Miranda all over; and the only thing to do was to secure the property to be settled on her so that Fergus Crane could not touch it. Curiously enough, before Miranda came back, Silas felt himself far more kindly disposed towards Fergus than if that braggart had returned in a blaze of glory. Fergus had always held the whip-hand before; now it was different; and Silas meant to use the whip that Providence had placed in his hands.


"Is my world!"

But the irrepressible Fergus, complacently ignoring the past, worked cheerfully away in the office of the *Four Corners Gazette*, setting up his own leaders with a slowness which lacked all his former precision. The old man was not inclined to forego the advantages which this fact gave him, but Fergus never retorted. There was a gleam of amusement in his eyes, that was all; and he went on setting type with a clumsiness which convinced Miranda that it was long since he had done an honest day's work. Not that the knowledge made any difference in her feeling for him. Whatever Fergus did was right; if the Fates had been unkind, his luck must change. Gifted with a woman's keen insight, she soon saw that her father was struggling against a positive affection for Fergus—an affection which he was so fearful of displaying, that he led him the life of a dog. One of the villagers, seeing much patient forbearance on the part of Fergus, attempted a similar course of action. The next moment he went sailing through the air, and landed on his back with a sickening thud which nearly jarred his teeth out. Silas, who witnessed this feat, chuckled, and became more unbearable than ever, well-knowing that for some inscrutable reason Fergus would endure all his quillets and gibes, and never treat him in the same way.

It was some time before Miranda secured an interview with her fallen knight. He did not avoid her, but simply failed to make opportunities. At last she found him alone on the verandah one evening, smoking the pipe of contemplation, instead of "setting up" inspired leaders about a barn which had just been erected in the village.

"When are we going to be married?" Miranda demanded, abruptly.

Fergus looked at his shabby clothing with undisguised amusement. "You don't think we ought to risk it under present circumstances?" he asked. "Besides, I've broken my word."

"How?" inquired Miranda.

"I promised to bring you back the world."

"Well?"

"Well?"

"Must I tell you" (the expression of her eyes was something wonderful to behold) "that this"—she touched his ragged coat lightly—"is my world!"

Fergus drew a long breath. "You mean it?"

"Of course I mean it. You don't think I'm going to insult myself by doubting you?"

He drew another long breath. "I never thought of it in that way," he said. "I—I wanted to try an experiment."

The unlooked-for appearance of Silas put an end to the conversation for the present, and Fergus walked away. Silas carried a letter in his hand.

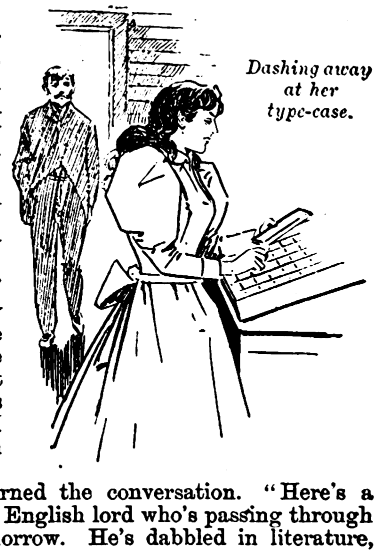
"What is it?" asked Miranda, discontentedly. "Do you know, I had almost made Fergus consent to marry me." She looked bitterly at her father. "I have almost to ask him to keep his word, because he is poor and won't take advantage of the situation. What do you think he cares more about than making a success? I'm sure you'll never guess."

"N-no," said the old man, dubiously; "don't know that I can."

"He wants to make you believe in him. That is partly why he has come back."

The old man looked at her in sudden anger. "Ain't I trying to believe in him? Haven't I been striving to, for your sake, all these years?" he asked. "He's a miserable skunk, or he'd have succeeded. The world's generally right—it doesn't make mistakes. Now, you've taught him to think it doesn't matter a shuck."

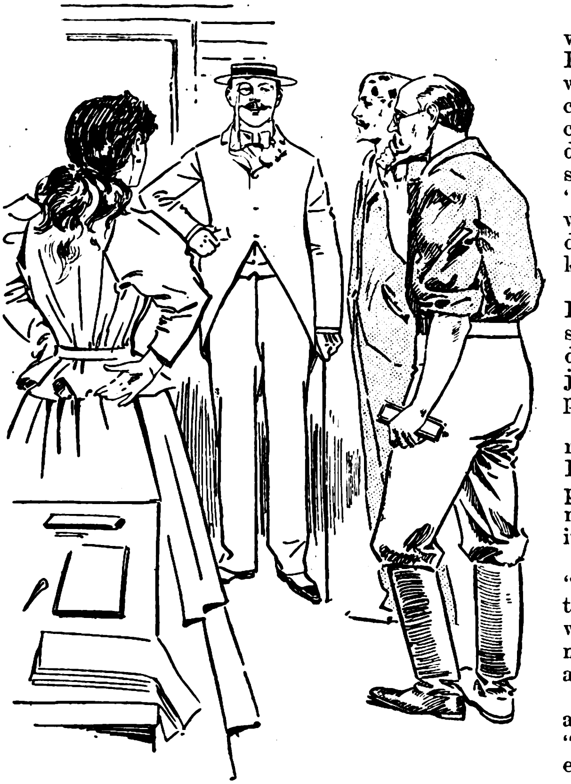
"It doesn't," said Miranda, calmly. "When people love, nothing matters. I love him more than ever for the way he puts up with your brutality. If I were a man, and you were not my father, I'd horsewhip you myself."


Dashing away at her type-case.

"I've only been trying to rouse him," said Silas, slightly ashamed, "to get up and do something."

"I wouldn't try that way if I were you, Dad," said the girl. "You might go too far. He's very patient, but I think he looks upon you as a penance."

The old man turned the conversation. "Here's a letter from a young English lord who's passing through to the Springs to-morrow. He's dabbled in literature, and has heard so much of 'the primitive simplicity of Canadian printing offices from his friend, W. D. Howells, that he will do himself the honour of calling on me to-morrow.' I'm not a truckler to the British aristocracy," continued Silas, with modest pride, "particularly hereditary aristocracy; but I'm going to show this man our office at its best. Fergus sets type so badly now that I daren't trust him to show off. You must come in to-morrow morning—he'll be here at eleven—and set up a column as fast as you can. Don't say anything to Fergus, mind. It might hurt his feelings. I don't know whether I ought to address this fellow as 'Your Lordship;' I fancy the best way will be not to call him anything at all. His name's Donnington. Crest, an eagle upside down, with a rat in its claws. Wonder what that means?"


"That's vewey good—vewey good."

Miranda thought that it must mean something unpleasant for the rat, but offered no explanation. The next morning found her, clad in a snowy apron and sleeves upturned to the elbow, dashing away at her type-case with a speed that roused Fergus's admiring envy. "I'd no idea I'd fallen off so much myself," he said, leisurely flicking a few letters into the type-holder. "I've almost forgotten how to feel for the nick in the letters, so as to get them right side up."

Fergus's easy-going expression changed to one of horror as Silas appeared in the doorway preceding a sandy-haired, tall young fellow, who was dressed in a light, thin, grey suit, and wore white spats over shining shoes.

"Hang it!" muttered Fergus, trying to slip behind a case.

Lord Donnington gave an amused stare of recognition at Fergus, and screwed a little circular glass into his right eye. "Bai Jove, Twee," he said, "so this is your twip to Patagonia! Vewey good! Vewey good! You're taking time enough to get there, bai Jove. Vewey good. Vewey good, indeed!"

"Who's this well-dressed idiot?" demanded Fergus, abruptly. "And where's his keeper?"

Lord Donnington put up his eyeglass again, and let it drop with a dismayed expression. "Ha! ha! Sylvanus; that's vewey good—vewey good. 'Well-dwessed idiot' is good. Personal, but good, bai Jove!" He turned and saw Miranda looking at him with widely-opened eyes. "Intwoduce me, my dear sir," he said to Silas; "intwoduce me, if Twee won't."

"My daughter, Lord Donnington," said Silas, stiffly. "This machine, O Lord——"

"My lord," prompted Miranda, in a very subdued whisper.

"Nevah mind the machine," said Lord Donnington, with a courteous bow to Miranda. "I want to know, you know, why Twee's callin' me names—callin' me nasty names, bai Jove."

"Who is this man?" asked Silas, seizing Fergus by the arm, and pulling him roughly into the middle of the floor.

Lord Donnington put up his eyeglass again. "Oh, come, I say," he said, feebly, "who is he? Why, you're havin' a game with me, bai Jove. He's——"

"Yes?" eagerly demanded Miranda, clasping Fergus by the other arm. "Who is he, my lord?"

"Sylvanus Twee," said his lordship. "Bites wooks—I mean wites books—you know. People go mad about 'em. Nevah could see much in 'em myself."

Silas seized the bewildered peer by the arm and loosed his hold of Fergus. "He isn't the author of 'Why Did She Do It?'"

"That's the man, and a vewey good fellow, too," said Lord Donnington; "though what's he up to, bai Jove, I can't make out, I weally can't, you know. 'Well-dwessed idiot,' and all that sort of thing you know, Twee. 'Where's his keepah!' It's wude. Beastly wude; and doosid bad form, too, you know."

"It is, Donnington," said Fergus; "but if you weren't such an ass you'd have seen I didn't want to be recognised just yet. I was trying an experiment."

"You're a twyin' expewiment yourself, Twee," said Lord Donnington, only half placated. "Bettah come with me to the Spwings and have it out."

Fergus held out his hand. "All right, old fellow. You took me by surprise. I wanted to introduce you to my future wife myself, that's all."

Lord Donnington smiled and produced his note-book. "Ah," he said, making an elaborate entry, "I compwehend. I'm goin' to be a week at the Spwings. Been eatin' too much, and all that sort of thing; got to dwink too much of the beastly wataws to make it wight again. Come and see me."

"Thanks; afraid I haven't time," said Fergus. "Shall hope to meet you at 'The New Vagabonds' dinner in London during November. Good-bye."

Lord Donnington made another note in his little book, fixed the eyeglass in his left eye this time, bowed gracefully to Miranda, and slowly went out to the stage-coach, the eyeglass again falling as he climbed to his seat.

Silas looked at Fergus; Fergus looked at Silas Miranda looked at them both.

"You needn't apologise," said Fergus, to his future father-in-law. "'Tisn't at all necessary."

"I wasn't going to," said Silas, intractable to the last.

"Let me be his apology," smiled Miranda, to the man who was "weally gweat."

AN IDYLL OF THE SEA

Night on the ocean; a gentle breeze swelled the white sails of the *Seagull* as she ploughed her way steadily southward over the restless bosom of the Atlantic. I lay stretched lazily upon a bale of sail-cloth, my eyes fixed far overhead upon the delicate tangle of ropes and yards etched against the starry sky.

The waves, parted by the good ship's prow, dashed in measured beats against her sides; from the rigging arose at intervals a deep musical murmur, as from the strings of a gigantic wind-harp.

Beautiful and revivifying, after the fierce glow of day, is the summer night on tropic seas, and I was enjoying it to the full. We were bound for Rio, and the voyage was two-thirds over.

I was thinking, as I lay there under the stars, of many things—of the home which I had left in search of health and distraction from painful thoughts, and perhaps in the hope of restoring my shattered confidence in human nature; for things had gone wrong with me, and I was indulging at the time in that sort of spurious cynicism which besets some men when life first presents itself stripped of shams and illusions.

All at once my reverie was disturbed by the wail of a child from the cabin below; I knew the sound. Among the passengers was a young woman in widow's weeds, accompanied only by a boy of four or five years. Nothing was known of her beyond the self-evident fact that she was young and beautiful, and that by the advice of physicians she was taking the boy—her only child—on this voyage, in the hope of restoring his strength, wasted by a long illness. A forlorn hope, indeed. It was plain to the most indifferent eye that the boy had been failing from the day we left London, as it seemed from sheer lack of vitality and consequent wasting of the tissues.

It was a sight to move the hardest heart—this young mother, worn to a shadow with long watching, her whole being absorbed by the passionate mother-love that refused, in the very face of despair, to relinquish hope.

Urged on by sympathy for her sad and solitary state, I, like other passengers, had offered such services as suggested themselves; like the others, I had been gently, but firmly, repulsed. To no one would the mother for a moment delegate the charge that was sapping her own life.

Shrinking from notice and avoiding all other companionship, she brooded over the fragile being who was slipping surely and all too rapidly from her clinging grasp.

The cry came up from the cabin again and again, shattering my reverie and filling me with uncomfortable forebodings. It was evident that the end was near, and, physician that I was, and cynic as I tried to believe myself, the thought of the young mother's despair disturbed and pained me.

With a selfish, yet perhaps natural prayer that the child might live at least until the land was reached, I rose on my elbow, and by way of diverting my thoughts, addressed myself to the sailor who was on watch at that hour. He leant against the foremast near me, a stalwart fellow, with handsome bronzed features and a pair of blue eyes as frank and clear as a child's.

By the light of the lantern swinging above his head I saw that his face was overspread with a look of melancholy quite out of keeping with the *rôle* of jolly Jack Tar that belonged to him, and it was not the first time I had noticed this expression on honest Tom's countenance. It may have been that, coupled with other unusual characteristics, which from the first day had attracted me to the fellow; whatever it was, I had found pleasure in studying this sturdy type of man, and had enjoyed many a quiet chat with him during the long voyage.

"A fine night, Tom," I began by way of opening conversation.

"Ay, sir, a fine night!" answered Tom in his deep tones, saluting me respectfully.

"It isn't often that you make a better trip than this, is it, Tom?"

"Well, no, sir. But we ain't there yit," he answered, significantly.

"You are familiar with these waters, I presume?"

"Well, sir, tol'able familiar. This makes my eleventh trip, I'm restless an' oneasy on shore, sir; all sailors is that, but 'pears to me, I'm a little more restless an' oneasy than most of 'em. Mebbe," he went on, his gruff voice softening a little, "mebbe, it's all along o' my not havin' any folks on shore belongin' to me. The ship is all the home I've had this many a year, sir. There was a time when it might a-been different, if so be—" At that moment some one hastily ascended the stairs leading from the cabin, and called my name. "It's the doctor, sir; Dr. Claas," said Tom, touching his cap, and turning away.

Dr. Claas, the ship's physician, hurriedly approached the place where I was reclining.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, extending his hand as I rose to meet him, and giving mine a hearty pressure, "but I believe you are a practising physician?"

As the doctor, a singularly grave and reticent man, had until now shown no desire to extend our acquaintance, I was unprepared for the cordiality of his greeting, but I answered at once in the affirmative.

"Then you are the only medical man besides myself on board, and I beg of you to consult with me in a most interesting case. I am not mistaken—you will do me this favour?"

As a young and comparatively inexperienced practitioner, I could not but feel flattered by the doctor's manner, and answered without hesitation:

"Certainly, with the greatest pleasure."

"Then, come, I beg," he earnestly said. "There is no time to lose."

As I passed Tom to follow Dr. Claas, I noticed that he was leaning forward, as if listening to what we had been saying, and I fancied that I heard him mutter some indistinct words as he resumed his position.

A moment later I stood with my colleague by the side of the sick child. He no longer moaned, but lay motionless and almost pulseless, upon his pillow. The mother sat by him, her dark hair falling loosely, her small hands lying listlessly in her lap, her face pale and tense with unutterable grief and pain. Physician though I was, and already inured to the sight of human suffering, I could not meet the look that was turned upon us as we entered.

On examination of the little sufferer I agreed perfectly with Dr. Claas in his diagnosis of the case; the child, though under the influence of no organic disease, was perishing from inanition. His life's small taper was flickering; in a few days at most it would go out in darkness unless—a sudden thought flashed across my mind, sending the blood bounding through my veins. I looked quickly into my colleague's face and met his eyes full upon me; a glance of quick intelligence passed from one to the other, and at the same instant one and the same word passed our lips. That word was—transfusion!

The thought had been simultaneous. To restore the child's almost extinguished vitality, the famishing frame, deprived of nutriment by the incapacity of the organs of digestion and assimilation to do their work, must be supplied with fresh life-material already prepared for assimilation. In other words, the warm, ruddy stream of life must be led direct from the arteries of a living, healthy being into the child's own depleted veins.

Only a physician can comprehend the glow of enthusiastic joy that pervaded our whole beings as this theory, then comparatively new and untried, presented itself before us with all its glorious possibilities.

The grave face of Dr. Claas fairly shone for a moment, then darkened again, and he shook his head gravely.

"A magnificent opportunity!" he said, in a tone of regret—"magnificent! But, unfortunately, impracticable. Being so near the end of our voyage we have not a living animal on board!"

A sharp cry interrupted my answer. In our professional zeal we had forgotten that the mother's ears were drinking in every word that was uttered. In an instant a slender arm, bared to the elbow, was extended towards us.

"I know what you mean," the little woman hurriedly said, her face flushing and paling again, "I have read much about it. I remember that it need not be an animal—a human being will do as well—even better!"

Even Dr. Claas was not proof against this. I saw his eyes grow moist as he took the extended hand gently in both his own. "It cannot be, madam," he said, as if speaking to a little child. "Compose yourself. We will retire and consider other means; something may yet suggest itself."

It was very hard to convince her that not from her fragile, exhausted frame might flow the invigorating stream that should give new life to her dying child. But we left her at last, sitting in listless despair by the little couch, as before, and returned to the deck, where Dr. Claas joined me in a long discussion of the subject that had been under consideration.

Tom, the sailor, was still on duty, pacing the deck at times, or leaning against the foremast, taking no apparent notice of our presence. At a late hour I bade Dr. Claas good-night, and retired to my berth, but not to sleep. The piteous face of that mother as we left her, having given the deathblow to her last hope, was constantly before me; her plaintive voice mingled with the monotonous splashing of the waves.

For what seemed hours I lay listening to every sound, longing for daylight, though it was not yet midnight, but finally eight bells sounded, and steps and voices overhead showed that Tom was being relieved from duty.

A moment later there was a knock at the door of my room, and in response to my astonished "Come in" it was opened, and Tom himself, looking very awkward and uncertain, stood on the threshold.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, in a husky whisper, fingering his cap like a bashful boy, "beg pardon, but I made sure you wasn't asleep, an' there was somethin' I wanted to ask ye right away, sir, if I may make so bold."

So far from being angry with Tom for his intrusion, I was glad of any interruption to my painful thoughts, and bade him enter and close the door.

"And now what is it, Tom?" I said, when he had done so.

"I wouldn't have ye think, sir, that I *meant* to listen to your conversation with the doctor," he began, after much preliminary shuffling and clearing of his voice, "but bein' where I was, some words came to my hearin', sir, an' after that I *couldn't* but lis'en, feeling an interest in the little chap myself. An' from what I heard I gathered as how there was somethin' that 'ould save his life, sir, if it could be had, an' because it *couldn't* be had, sir, the poor little chap must die."

Tom made a little halt here, and then continued:

"I—I couldn't rightly make out what it was as was wanted an' can't be had."

Tom's gruff voice trembled a good deal as he stumbled through his clumsy speech, and he shifted himself from one foot to the other a good many times.

It was impossible for me to feel either amusement or vexation at what might have seemed to some very like presumption. I did not hesitate to explain to Tom as simply and clearly as possible the theory of transfusion, the obstacles in the way of its application in the present case, and the regret of Dr. Claas and myself at the loss of so fine an opportunity.

Tom listened breathlessly, leaning forward, his eyes fixed upon me, his lips moving in unconscious imitation of my own. When I had finished, he straightened himself, putting one hand to his curly head with a perplexed air.

"Ay, ay!" he slowly said; "that was it! I wasn't sure as I got it right end up, sir, but that was it! Ye see it has a powerful strange sound to a man like me; but jest let me once git my bearin's, sir, so't I don't run agin no sunken rocks nor sandbanks, an' I'm all right, sir. You say that the blood of a livin', breathin' healthy animal, beast or human, pumped, so to speak, into the veins of an ailin' creatur', beast or human, will save life. Wal', sir," and drawing himself up, he bared for my inspection one magnificent muscular arm, freshly tattooed with all a sailor's taste and ingenuity. "Wal', sir, here am I, eight-and-twenty year of age, tough as oak, an' though I say it as shouldn't, mebbe, as sober a man as ever trod deck, an' the little chap yonder is welcome to the last drop o' blood in my veins, so be it might save him to the poor little woman that is breakin' her heart over him, as any man can see."

I sprang from my berth and seized Tom's hard brown hand.

"My brave fellow," I cried, "you will do this for the sake of a child who is nothing to you, and a woman you never saw before and never will see again?"

A strange smile came over Tom's face, and his eyes sought the floor.

"I will, sir," he answered, hoarsely, "for the sake of that same woman—as I shall never see again, mos' likely."

In an incredibly short time I stood again with Dr. Claas at the door of the state-room we had left a few hours before in so different a mood. It was opened by the child's mother, who had been prepared for our coming, and welcomed us with eagerness. Already reviving hope had given some brightness and colour to her face.

"You have found someone who is willing to render this service?" she began, excitedly. "A sailor, you say? Oh, where is he? Let me see him and speak with him. I must thank him for his noble kindness——"

Meantime Tom had remained in shadow, but, as she came forward, looking eagerly about her, he stepped out into the light, and stood awaiting her, cap in hand. She sprang towards him with extended hands. "Oh, you good, brave fellow; God bless you!" she began, fervently. "God must and will bless you for your kindness to a poor despairing mother——"

She stopped abruptly, as if suddenly turned to stone. The full light of the lamp fell over the sailor's athletic figure and pale, agitated face. His eyes were fixed upon her with an inscrutable expression. For some time the two stood gazing at each other in silence, then, with a loud cry, the woman started forward, wavered, and would have fallen but for Tom, who seized her in his mighty arms and laid her on the nearest sofa.

For a moment he stood bending over her, his form perceptibly shaken, his face hidden; then, at a summons from Dr. Claas, with whom the necessity for prompt action superseded all other emotions, he left the unconscious woman in charge of the stewardess, and followed us into the state-room.

A half-hour later the operation had been successfully accomplished.

We found the mother still lying on the sofa where we had left her, but at the sound of our steps she started up wildly expectant.

"Be calm, madam," said Dr. Claas, his very voice and mien expressing the satisfaction he felt, "all has passed off well. Your child is sleeping peacefully, and we have every reason to hope for the best."

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!" said the happy mother, with streaming eyes.

"But the man—the sailor—where is he? I must see him—there is something to be explained," she continued, in deeply agitated tones.

But Tom had slipped silently away, and was not to be found.

"It is better so," said the doctor, returning to the saloon. "You have had enough excitement for to-night."

Then, after administering a sedative, we left the now hopeful woman to return to her child, while we sought such rest as the brief summer night might have yet in store for us.

In the course of the next morning, having made an early call with my colleague upon our little patient with the most gratifying results, I found myself on deck.

Suddenly the dull silence was broken by the sound of excited voices, which I recognised as those of the Captain and Dr. Claas.

"For the last time, sir," the captain was saying in angry tones, "I repeat, that such conduct is entirely unbecom ing, and against my wishes. Yesterday you led one of my men on to an act of romantic foolhardiness, and to-day, without consulting me, you send him down below to his hammock, to recover from the consequences of this eccentric and absurd experiment. Why, sir, you are exceeding your authority. You are encouraging insubordination. Once more, sir, it cannot be allowed!"

"Allow me to say, captain," said Dr. Claas, with great self-control, "that there was no leading on in the matter, whatever. As I call this gentleman to witness (turning towards me) the man having overheard us as we discussed the subject on deck, not dreaming that he would hear, or at least comprehend what we were saying, came forward and offered himself for the experiment—an act which not one man in a hundred would be capable of, sir. To send him aloft to repair a broken yard under a sky like this, after such a loss of blood, would be simply brutal, sir."

The doctor's earnest speech had its effect upon the testy but kind-hearted officer, and after some further efforts on our united parts, the captain returned to the quarter-deck in a somewhat mollified mood.

At the suggestion of Dr. Claas I went below to look after Tom. The brave fellow lay stretched in his hammock in the close, small cabin, in a troubled sleep. The open collar of his blouse exposed to view a throat and chest of statuesque proportions; his curling brown hair was matted over his forehead; his face, haggard beneath its deep bronze hue, wore a look of gentleness and suffering.

The interest I had felt from the start in this fine specimen of Nature's nobleman had mounted to enthusiasm, and I was impatient to know more of the man and of his relations with the woman, seemingly so far removed from his own sphere in life, upon whom his appearance had produced so startling an effect.

Not to disturb the sleeper, I was withdrawing noiselessly, but at the moment Tom stirred and opening his eyes, gazed at me, with a bewildered stare. His glance was uncertain, his lips trembled, as with fever.

"What time is it?" he asked, feebly. "Have I slept long?"

"It is twelve," I answered. "You have slept two hours, and can lie and rest as long as you feel like it. It is the captain's order. How are you feeling?" I added, seating myself on the blue-painted chest that doubtless contained the sailor's worldly possessions.

"Better now," answered Tom; "but a while ago my legs would scarcely bear me, and my head whirled round like a rusty capstan. It is powerful kind o' you, sir, to come an' ask after me. An' how is the little chap gettin' on?" he added, his voice softening suddenly.

"Very well indeed, Tom. I have been with Dr. Claas to see him, and unless we are much mistaken the tide has turned, and the boy will recover. And if he does, Tom, it is to you he owes his life."

Words cannot picture the look that transfigured the sailor's sun-bronzed countenance—a look of deep and perfect content. He kept his eyes on the ceiling over his head for some time, his lips smiling like a child's.

"Good!" I heard him whisper. "That does me good to hear. The boy will live, an' she will be happy. Good!"

But after a while he turned to me again.

"Mebbe," he began, doubtfully—"mebbe you might a-guessed, from what you saw, that the little chap's mother an' me wasn't no strangers, sir; an' if ye don't mind lis'enin', I'd like to tell ye how things is, an' was, sir; for I wouldn't have ye go to think harm of *her*, not knowing."

I assured Tom that I was only too glad to listen to his story if it would not fatigue him too much in the telling.

"No, sir," he said; "it'll be a powerful relief to git it off my mind, along of her that might be misjudged, if ye didn't know the true facts. No, sir; Nell—that's her—Nell an' me is no strangers. We was born an' brought up in a little village ye likely never heard of, away down on the coast. Ay, different as things is now; our folks was neighbours, an' Nell an' me was playmates an' friends as long ago as I can remember, though her folks was better off than mine, an' Nell had a better chance at books an' the like.

"So when I grow up an' began to follow the sea like my father an' gran'father afore me, it come about quite natural that I should begin to look on Nell as my sweetheart, an' she on me. Every time I got home from a voyage I found her prettier an' sweeter, an' fonder of me—leastways, I thought so then.

"She was a beauty in them days, sir, as ye can judge for yourself now, though she's changed powerful, poor girl! But in them times she led the fleet, sir. The city folks that come down to the coast o' summers took a deal o' notice of Nell—she was that proud an' sperrited, an' could hold her own with the best, her father bein' a retired cap'n as had made his pile, but warn't in no way stuck up, an' favoured me, poor sailor though I was.

"Well, sir, there come a time when I started off on a three years' cruise. It was pretty tough, that was, but we was to be married when it was over, an' with that look ahead, sir, bein' young an' ambitious, the time passed pretty quick. It's a rough life, a sailor's, as every man knows, an' I'm free to own as I've been a bit wild in my time, sir, but as I'm a livin' man to-day, I was true to Nell all through that three years' cruise. Whenever we made port, instead o' foolin' away my money with the rest, I was hangin' round shops an' bazaars, a-pickin' up pretty things for Nell—silk handkerchiefs, an' carved boxes an' fans, an' all kinds o' furrin' notions that women love.

"Nell never got to see 'em sir; they're stowed away in that there blue chest as you're a-settin' on this minute; for, as mebbe you've guessed by this time, when we made port I found Nell married an' gone—ay, sir, married to a fine gentleman from the city, an' gone to live amongst his kind of folks. Ay," he added, with a husky laugh, "if I'd got home a month sooner I might a-danced at her weddin'.

"An' I forgot to mention that the old man was dead, or mebbe it mightn't 'a' happened—though I don't know as it would have made any odds. No, sir, I never laid no blame on to *her*, though I own as it hit me hard, an' sent me a-careerin' over the world like a ship that's lost rudder an' compass.

"It's a-goin' on seven years since it happened, sir, an' I'd begun to git in a way used to it, though it sorter took me afresh when the ship was homeward bound, an' I remembered as no one was a-waitin' an' a-watchin' for *me*, my folks bein' dead and gone long ago, when there was she a-comin' on board this here ship, a lone woman at her age—she's only twenty-six, sir—an' lookin' so peaked, an' a-holdin' on for dear life to that there little youngster as a stout breeze might blow away! An' now you know how it is; an' why I was willin' to do what I've done; not for a strange woman (though I ain't sure as I wouldn't a-done the same), but for the little woman that was to a-been my wife. The little woman I ain't never forgot, an' never shall forget, though she never can be aught to a rough sailor like me."

"But she asked for you, Tom, this morning. She wishes to see you," I said.

Tom laid his bandaged arm across his face, but his deepening colour did not escape me, and I saw how the burly frame was shaken with sudden emotion.

"No, sir," he said, huskily, after some moments. "No, sir; it's better not. Tell her I say it's better not. Tell her she's free an' welcome to all I done, an' if 'twas to do over again, she'd be free an' welcome to the last drop o' my heart's blood, so be the little chap was flourishing an' she was happy. An' tell her," he continued, softly, "if so be as she should say anything to you about what's past an' gone, that I ain't never harboured nothin' agin her, first or last, an' wishes her well an' happy wherever she may be."

In my interest in Tom's narration I had not observed the gradual darkening of the cabin, but now all motion seemed suddenly and strangely suspended.

It needed not Tom's sudden, excited cry to tell me the meaning of this. I knew intuitively that we were at the mercy of a hurricane.

At the first sound Tom had leaped from his hammock, and flung open the door. Above the roar of the elements could be heard a confusion of voices, a hurried rush of feet, then clear and distinct came the captain's voice, shouting through his trumpet:

"*All hands on deck.*"

Instantly Tom sprang towards the stairs, turning only to say as I would have followed him:

"No passengers allowed on deck! Take care of yourself, and keep cool, sir: Ay, ay, sir!" he shouted back, as the trumpet-call sounded again.

I tried to detain him, to speak some words of caution and protest. My voice was drowned by the storm, and Tom shook off my hand with a laugh. With one spring he mounted the stairs and lifted the hatchway.

Stumbling and pitching along the narrow, dark gangway, I made my way to the state-room of our little patient, and with the aid of cushions and pillows made the position of mother and child as secure as possible; then I turned my attention to the women and children in the saloon.

Towards sunset the hurricane seemed to have expended it power, and though the ship continued to pitch frightfully, the passengers dragged themselves to their respective state-rooms, myself among the rest; and against my will, for I meant to seize the first possibility of reaching the deck, I sank, from sheer exhaustion, into a sleep, which lasted until daybreak. As soon as I was conscious I left my room and hastened on deck.

Almost the first person I saw was Dr. Claas, who was coming in search of me.

At sight of his face a sharp pang went through me.

"We are safe, yes," he said, seizing my hand; "but the storm had its victim."

"Tom?" I barely whispered.

"Yes, Tom!"

It seems that at the very height of the storm one of the sails became loose from its fastenings, and, sweeping the deck, caused the ship to careen dangerously to leeward. The captain called for volunteers to climb the topmost and cut away the sail. It was a perilous undertaking in such a wind. Of all the crew only one man came forward. It was Tom. Firm and sure he made the ascent, and cut away the ropes; the sail flew swiftly off over the frothing sea, and the ship righted herself at once.

Hand over hand, swinging himself gallantly from yard to yard, the brave fellow descended; but when half-way down he was seen to miss his grasp, to clutch at the ropes, to fall heavily to the deck.

* * * * * * * * *

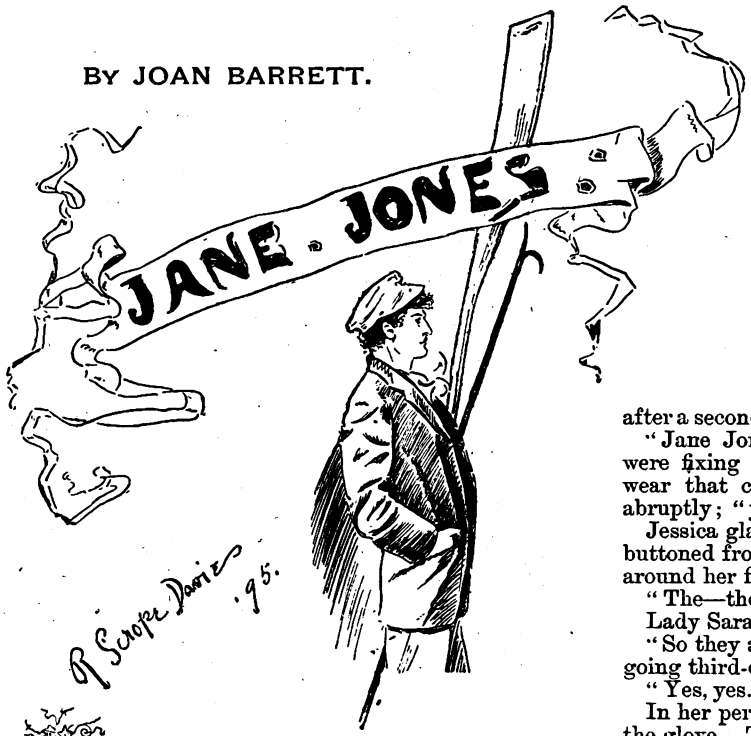
The sun was setting when, wrapped in the ship's flag, a tribute rendered to his heroic worth and splendid seamanship, the dead sailor was consigned to his unmarked grave.

In low tones the captain read the burial service; for a moment each head was bent in silent prayer; then, at a signal, there was a swift gliding of ropes, a splash, and the laughing waves closed above all that was mortal of the humble hero of this simple tale.

N. N.

JANE JONES

BY JOAN BARRETT.



“I HOPE you will be back in time to give the dear children their tea,” said Lady Sarah Chesney to her young governess, Jessica Dene. “And do pray be careful about making inquiries as to the nature of your friend’s illness before you enter her room. With so many little ones in the house we dare not risk their taking any ailment.”

Jessica’s beautiful little face flushed crimson. She bent her head almost confusedly over the long suède glove which she was pulling upon her hand. Lady Sarah looked at the gloves in disapproval.

“The extravagant girl must spend quite half of her salary for gloves,” she thought, with a tightening of her thin lips. “That pair must have cost at least six shillings. *I* have to be content with cheap ones!”

Lady Sarah’s grim regard wandered over Jessica’s grey dust-cloak and broad sun hat. She asked herself what it was in Miss Dene’s appearance that seemed so holiday-like that morning. The grey dust cloak was far from new, and had been worn by Jessica for two summers, and the straw hat was merely a cheap affair of a few shillings, scarlet poppies, grey tulle and all included.

“It must be those gloves,” said Lady Sarah, mentally. “Of course you will not think of seeing your friend if you hear that she is suffering from any infectious malady,” she said aloud to Jessica. “You will come home at once.”

“Yes,” Jessica replied in a low tone.

“And when you pass by old Mrs. Gregg’s,” continued Lady Sarah, “pray make her understand that soup is only given away *once* a week at the Vicarage, and not every day, as she seems to expect. I wish you to mention at the same time that I desire her grandson to come round to the servants’ entrance. I found him waiting at the hall door with a great water-jug only yesterday. Please tell Mrs. Gregg that for the future she must send a basin only for the soup.” Lady Sarah paused a moment, half closing her eyes in reflection.

“Oh, yes, and don’t forget to leave the list at the stores and to call at the dyer’s about Mary’s dress. It will not take you long,” she added, suddenly aware of a troubled expression in Jessica’s eyes. “And walking about in the open air will be far better for you than remaining in the close atmosphere of a sick-room. By the way, what is your friend’s name?”

The colour died in Jessica’s cheeks. She tugged nervously at her glove.

“Jones,” she answered, hesitatingly, and after a second of silence, “Jane Jones—yes—Jane Jones.”

“Jane Jones,” repeated Lady Sarah, as though she were fixing the name in her memory. “How can you wear that cloak upon such a hot day?” she asked, abruptly; “you will be stifled.”

Jessica glanced apprehensively at her cloak. It was buttoned from head to foot, yet she drew its folds closer around her figure.

“The—the—carriages are so—so—dirty,” she faltered.

Lady Sarah’s stern features relaxed.

“So they are,” she said, in a kinder tone. “You are going third-class?”

“Yes, yes.”

In her perturbation, Jessica pulled more roughly at the glove. The kid, resenting the ill-treatment, split in the palm. Jessica looked at it and laughed stupidly.

“I must get another pair,” she murmured, moving hastily towards the door.

“What a sad pity!” Lady Sarah exclaimed, thinking of the glove, and almost as much vexed in her frugal soul as though it were her own. “Perhaps you could draw it neatly together with silk.”

“I will try. Have you any other commission?”

“The Vicar has a letter for you to post. You will find it in his study. Oh, bring back a small jar of marmalade from the stores. It is not heavy, and you can carry it beneath your cloak. I promised the dear children that you should bring them something from Walton.”

“Very well. Good-bye, Lady Sarah.”

Lady Sarah watched Jessica from the room.

“There really is something odd about the girl this morning,” she said to herself. “She looks as though she were going on a visit of pleasure instead of answering a call to a sick-bedside.”

The Rev. Hugh Chesney was composing his weekly sermon when Jessica entered the study. He raised his thin, careworn face from the partly-covered sheet of ruled paper, and pushed his spectacles higher upon his nose, as Jessica came to his side.

“Going to Walton to see your sick friend?” he asked, kindly. “I trust you will find her in better health, Miss Dene—do you mind waiting a moment—I’ve a few leaflets somewhere which I think your friend may find both profitable and entertaining to read.” He began to turn over a pile of tracts as he spoke. “‘Advice to a Drunkard.’ Hum, that will hardly do! ‘Jane Blair, or the Converted Washerwoman,’ that is not quite suitable perhaps; but these small books your friend cannot fail to derive instruction from. She need not return them.”

Jessica took the flat parcel of tracts, with a faint smile dawning round her pretty lips.

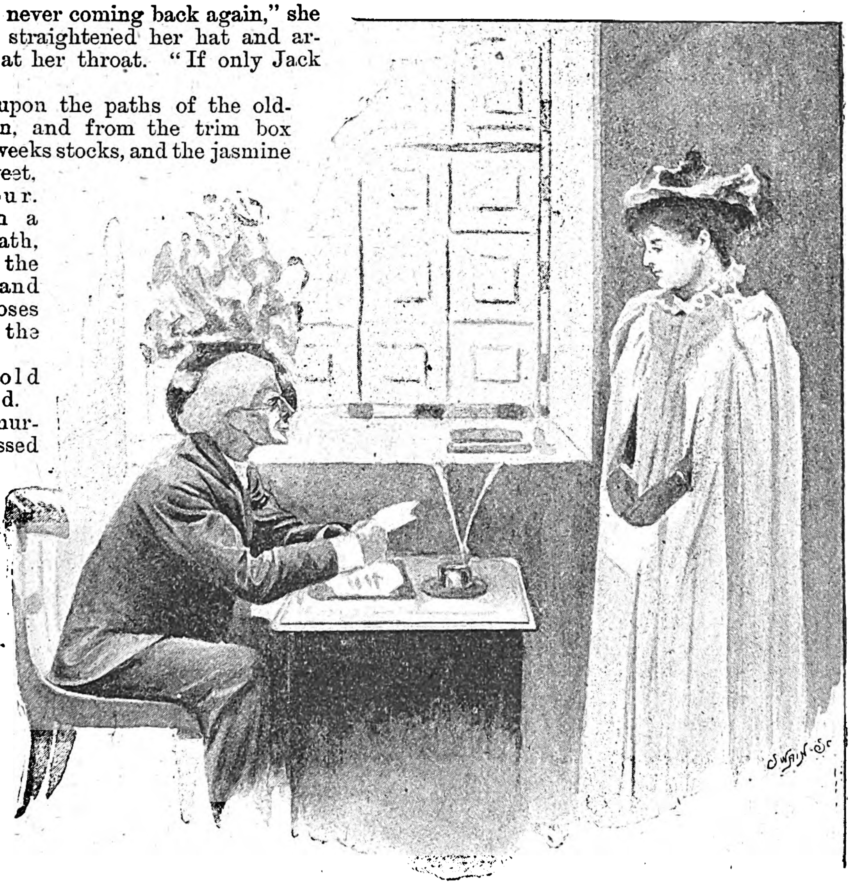
"Thank you, Mr. Chesney," she said, and there was a suspicious tremble in her voice.

The Vicar looked after Jessica as she went from the room. Like his wife, he was puzzled at the indefinable change in her appearance.

"She grows prettier and prettier every day," he murmured to himself, with a shake of his head. "Poor child!"

In the hall, Jessica paused to cast a glance at herself in a mirror which hung there. She smiled saucily at her reflection.

"I wish I were never coming back again," she declared, as she straightened her hat and arranged the bow at her throat. "If only Jack were rich——"



The Rev. Hugh Chesney was composing his weekly sermon.

The sun lay upon the paths of the old-fashioned garden, and from the trim box borders, the ten-weeks stocks, and the jasmine bushes came a sweet, confused odour. Jessica drew in a long, deep breath, looking back at the red brick house and the tangled roses that covered the porch.

"Hateful old prison!" she said.

Her step was hurried as she passed down the straggling village street. The women standing in little knots gossiping at their doors, nodded to her. Jessica barely noticed them, so great was her hurry.

Old Mrs. Gregg, from her window, made frantic signs to the clergyman's governess to enter her house. Jessica quickened her pace at this moment.

"I can't stop! I can't stop!" she cried aloud; but Mrs. Gregg could not hear her, and hobbled to the door to call after her.

At the sound of that weak, piping voice, a very demon of fear entered Jessica's heart. She could see the steam issuing from the station. The train for Staines was waiting. She dare not lose it. Regardless of Mrs. Gregg's cries, she began to run, and at last she entered the station panting and breathless.

Someone half lifted her into a compartment. A porter rushed up with her ticket, and Jessica took it with trembling fingers. It was most vexing that attention should be directed to her in this manner. Lady Sarah or the Vicar might hear during the day that she had asked for a ticket for Staines. Everything that one did or said was always talked over in the village. What a very tiresome place Chessington was!

She was pushing the ticket into the palm of her glove, when a well-known voice exclaimed, in a half-amused, half-vexed tone:

"After my lifting you into the carriage, too! It is really unkind of you, Miss Dene, to snub me in this manner."

Jessica raised her eyes in startled surprise. She had been too much flurried to observe the other occupant of the compartment; indeed, she was hardly aware that she was not alone. She looked at the man facing her with a vivid blush crimsoning her cheeks, and her heart began to flutter in a most unreasonable way.

"Oh, Doctor Mordaunt," she faltered, with sweet shyness in her voice, "I—I—am so sorry!"

"If you are really and truly penitent I must forgive you," Doctor Mordaunt said, holding out his hand. "May I ask where you are going?"

Jessica's under lip began to tremble.

"Lady Sarah has very kindly given me permission to spend the day with a—a—friend — Jane Jones," she answered, hurriedly.

"I thought you had no friends in the neighbourhood."

"Jane Jones is my only friend—and she does not live here—she is only visiting," explained Jessica, becoming more and more confused and rosy.

"Miss Jones is an old lady, I suppose?"

Jessica shook her head, and attempted to withdraw her hand from the doctor's clasp. He seemed to have forgotten that he was still retaining it. Her cloak had become unfastened in her run to the station, and a loose, white flannel blouse was visible beneath, quite a nautical looking garment.

"This is the first occasion that I have had the pleasure of meeting you alone outside the Vicarage," said Doctor Mordaunt, suddenly. "I wonder if you know how happy

I feel at having you all to myself, even for so short a time."

Jessica's eyelids dropped. She evaded the doctor's glance.

"I wish you felt as pleased as I do. I wish——" he paused, for Jessica had wrenched her hand almost roughly away, and, with the abrupt movement, the little packet of leaflets had fallen to the ground. Each bent for them. A tress of Jessica's hair brushed the doctor's cheek. He looked up, and met her eyes fully. The packet fell once more to the floor; as Doctor Mordaunt took the girl's hands.

"Jessica!" he exclaimed. She interrupted him with a nervous laugh.

"Oh, if you please, do give me Jane Jones's tracts," she said. "The Vicar asked me to carry them to her. There is room for a lot of improvement in Jane. That is why I am taking them to him—to her, I mean."

"Never mind those things. I want to tell you——"

"But I *do* mind!" she cried. "Jane will be so disappointed—and——"

"She will get over her disappointment. You know what I am trying to say to you—don't make it more difficult for me——"

"If it is difficult at all, please don't bother about saying it," she advised, foolishly. "I—I—wouldn't."

"But I must tell you. I have been wanting to tell you for many months," said Doctor Mordaunt, in an earnest voice. "It ought not to be hard to say, 'I love you.' I want you to understand that I love you very dearly, Jessica."

The train stopped. A porter ran past the window, shouting, "Staines!"

Jessica was dimly aware that Doctor Mordaunt had descended and was holding out both hands inviting her to alight. In her confused trouble she hesitated. She had caught sight of a handsome young man in flannels, who was pushing his way roughly among the people, as he peered anxiously into the various carriages.

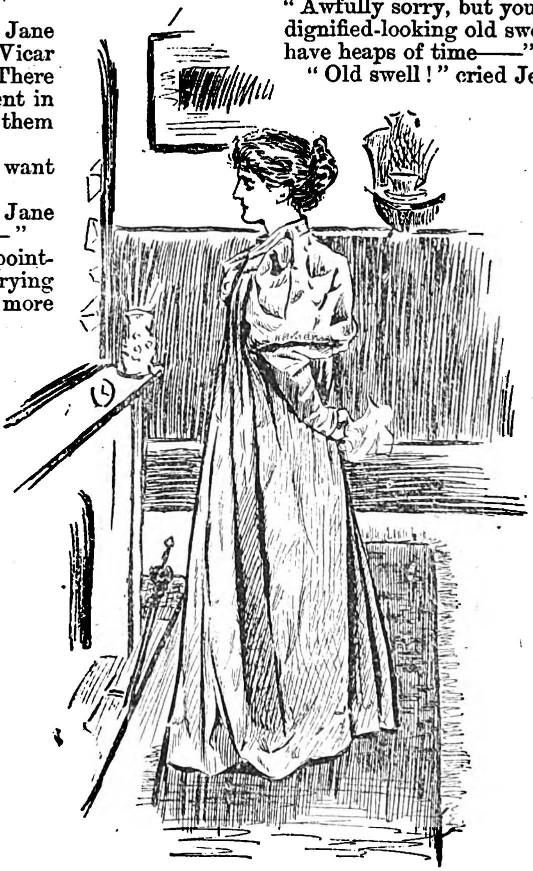
"There is Jane Jones!" exclaimed Jessica, abruptly and joyously.

She was sorry the next moment, for Doctor Mordaunt, after glancing at the young man in amazement, had drawn back with cold sternness written in every line of his face.

Jane Jones heard Jessica's cry. He elbowed the doctor aside with unceremonious brusqueness, placed his foot upon the step, and seizing Jessica by the waist lifted her bodily to the ground.

"Your train's a good ten minutes late," said he. "Come on. I've had the boat waiting for the past hour."

She half raised her face as though she expected him to kiss her. He drew back with a laughing, protesting gesture.



Standing in her dressing-gown before a looking-glass.

"For shame, Jess, and before all the people too! You really make me blush, my dear. Now, don't begin to cry; you shall hug me to your heart's content in the boat when the camera fiend is not in sight."

Jessica cast a troubled glance at Doctor Mordaunt. He had only waited for that. Slightly raising his hat, he turned away, but not before Jessica had noticed the icy contempt of his regard.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried, and half turned as though to follow the doctor's retreating figure.

Jane Jones caught her by the arm, and dragged her from the station.

"We can't afford to lose a minute, old girl," said he. "Awfully sorry, but you must put off making eyes at dignified-looking old swells until I've left you. You'll have heaps of time——"

"Old swell!" cried Jessica, wrathfully. "He's not at all old! He is only thirty-eight!"

"I did not remark that he was growing bald, sweetest," said Jane Jones, in a soothing tone.

* * * * *

How it came about no one could tell, but about a week after Jessica's visit to Staines, she sickened with typhoid fever.

Lady Sarah, well versed in the symptoms of most maladies, was the first person at the Vicarage to detect that a serious illness lurked in the little governess's heavy eyelids and flushed cheeks. Despite the Vicar's remonstrance, she sent Jessica away to an old farmhouse, many miles from the Vicarage.

"One cannot be too careful," she said to the Vicar, "and we have ourselves and the dear children to think of before our governess. Every care will be taken of her, and Doctor Mordaunt is sure to bring her safely through."

The Vicar rubbed his thin cheeks. He was filled with pity for poor, pretty Jessica.

"I begged her to be careful in visiting her sick friend, Jane Jones," continued Lady Sarah. "She could not have carried out my instructions. Without a doubt, she has caught Jane Jones's malady, and we shall be extremely fortunate if we escape ourselves."

But no other inmate of the Vicarage became ill, and while Jessica lay fighting for life in the old-fashioned farm bedroom, the Vicar's babies were racing about in the Vicarage paddock, lusty and healthy, rejoicing in their absolute freedom from the school-room and lessons. Doctor Mordaunt fought hard for Jessica's life. The grey hairs grew thicker among the brown ones that covered his head, and a tinge of the same colour appeared in his moustache.

Once when she lay feeble, but conscious, in the white dimity-hung bed, he became aware of the wistful expression in her sunken eyes. His thoughts flew at once to the young man in flannels, whom she had been so anxious to kiss.

"Do you want to see anyone?" he asked, gently, as he bent over her.

She shook her head, and it seemed to him that the sadness deepened in her wasted face.

"Are you quite sure? I could so easily bring anyone to you if you wished."

"I have no one to visit me, except Lady Sarah and the children," Jessica answered, in weak tones. "I don't want to see them—just yet."

Doctor Mordaunt was puzzled. Had the puppy in flannels only amused himself with Jessica?

One day when she was stronger he entered the room, and found her standing in her dressing-gown before a looking-glass. She was examining her pinched features with a self-pitying, wistful air, that amused even while it saddened him.

"Come, come," he said; "this will never do. You must not over-tax your strength, you know. Let me help you back to the sofa."

Doctor Mordaunt had never studied the varying expressions of any patient's face as he studied Jessica's. He became aware that she was shy and ill at ease in his presence, she had nothing to say, and appeared painfully embarrassed. "It's that train affair," he thought in vexation. "She can't forget that I once told her I loved her."

When there existed no possible danger of infection the Vicar's eldest boy Bobby came to see Jessica. He brought her a letter with a foreign postmark upon it. Doctor Mordaunt was in the room. He heard the low, glad cry of joy she gave, and saw the happy colour that crept into her cheeks.

"That fellow's letter will do more good than all my tonics," he said, almost jealously to himself.

Bobby had climbed upon the sofa, and was regarding Jessica with an inquisitive look in his round, ruddy face.

"I say," he said, "you have got thin, Miss Dene. Didn't they give you lots of jellies and custards and things?"

Jessica nodded as she fingered her letter.

"Mother said you were costing a lot of money. I wish I'd been ill, too. We only get sago and babies' puddings up in the nursery. Mother said you would die. We were all going to your funeral; and Milly was going to give all the flowers from her own syringa bush. She made a lovely wire cross, and when mother told us that Doctor Mordaunt had saved your life Milly got awfully wild. She and Dolly had been playing at your funeral for ever so long. I say, are you really devoted to Miss Dene, Doctor Mordaunt? Mother said you were. She said that a bat could see it! but bats are blind, aren't they?"

Doctor Mordaunt refused to meet Jessica's eyes.

"Of course I am devoted—to all my patients, Bobby."

"I say, did Jane Jones die?" asked Bobby, with startling abruptness.

"Jane Jones!" repeated Jessica.

"Yes, your friend at Walton who was ill, you know."

Jessica began to laugh hysterically.

"No, no—he didn't die."

"*He?* Jane Jones is a *she*," said Bobby, contemptuously.

Jessica laughed again. She could not control her merriment. But it ceased suddenly when she met Doctor Mordaunt's regard. The stern coldness of his face forced her to remember that he knew of the deception which she had played upon Lady Sarah—knew it, and despised her. Oh, she was sure of it!

"I'm tired, Bobby," she said. "Thank Milly for wanting to give me the flowers, and tell her that her cross may come in for me yet."

When Bobby had gone, and Dr. Mordaunt was collecting his hat, stick, and gloves, Jessica sat upright upon the sofa.

"Please don't look so angry," she entreated, in a very small voice. "I've been wanting to explain to you about Jane Jones for ever such a long time. Oh, if you frown like that I shall never find the courage to tell you."

"I am not interested in Jane Jones, Miss Dene."

"But you are interested in me," said Jessica, bravely, "and so you must be in Jane Jones. I am very fond of him——"

"I am quite aware of that."

"I am more fond of Jane Jones than of anyone else in the world—I mean I *used* to be more fond of him at one time, you know, and he's a sailor, poor boy, and when he wrote to me and asked me to spend just one day with him before he sailed for France, I—I—went, and I told Lady Sarah a fib about it, but she doesn't matter, it is you," said Jessica, a little wildly, and passing her hot hands over her eyes. "I can't bear that you should think me wicked just because I told a story in order to get away. I had asked once before to see him, and she had refused; she said that she could not have my family coming to the——"

"*Your family!* Who *is* Jane Jones?"

"Who!" Jessica repeated. "She is my brother Jack—who did you think she was?"

Doctor Mordaunt was kneeling by the sofa before Jessica quite knew how it came about. I am afraid that he had kissed her, too.

"Oh, Jessica!" he said. "I have been so jealous."

"And I've been so miserable," whispered she. "You used to scold me for not getting strong. I felt that I could never get quite well while I feared that you despised me."

"I never despised you, dearest. I was jealous. I thought that Jane Jones was your lover."

"My lover! Didn't you see that he wouldn't let me kiss him at the station, though he is very fond of me, and spends a lot of money, poor boy, in buying me gloves and things. You ought to have known by the way I wanted to kiss him that he was my brother. Any woman would have guessed our relationship at once."

"But I'm only a poor foolish man, sweetheart! I was actually stupid enough to believe that you didn't care a pin about me, and that I had been an exceptionally conceited individual ever to dream of making you my wife."

"And don't you think that you are conceited now, sir?"

"Do you?"

Jessica gave a low happy laugh.

"Oh, I only know that I'm very happy," she said. "I do think that you're quite the cleverest and the nicest doctor in existence——"

"Only the cleverest and the nicest doctor, Jessica? Nothing more?"

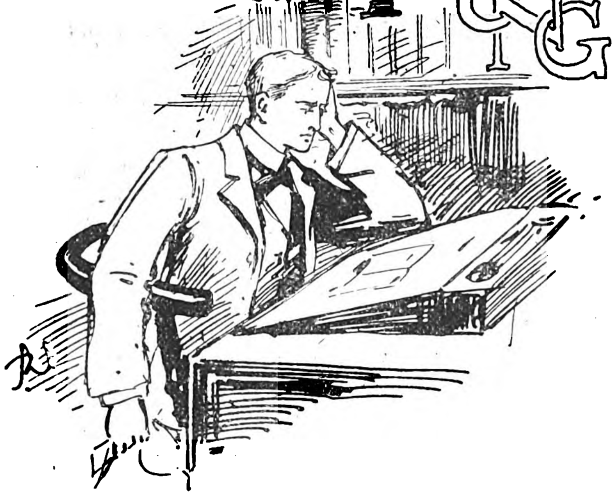
"Why, you vain old thing, what do you want me to say?" she asked. "Would you feel a little more satisfied if I just happened to observe in a casual kind of way that—that you are the very dearest person in the world?"

"Dearer even than Jane Jones?"

She hesitated a moment before answering, but it was only to tease him.

"Lots dearer," she answered. "Poor Jane Jones!"

YOUNG DR. JARVIS



He sat alone in his office, reading, perhaps for the twentieth time, the note on the desk before him. The afternoon sunshine touched with pale radiance the familiar objects in the little room. In a faint, flickering fashion it illuminated the shelves of books, the dusty cases of specimens, the stiff row of pictures that adorned the walls, the ragged rug, the worn oil-cloth carpet; but it seemed to linger on the solitary figure in the office chair.

It revealed a sensitive, restless face, with signs of great weakness, great passion, and great tenderness; such a face as men like and women love. It was dark with pain and anger now, for the note had roused a host of sleeping memories. The air seemed full of odour, the remembered odour of hyacinths; and in every shadowy corner Jarvis could see the insolent, smiling face of the woman who had written it.

He crushed the perfumed paper in his hand, though it was only a kind invitation to the poor, struggling country doctor to take charge of a good case, consult with a famous surgeon, and cure—if he could—a sick man. It read simply enough:

> Dear Dr. Jarvis,—Mamma wishes me to ask you to come up to-day to see Mr. Morton, who is very ill, and to meet Dr. Linyard, the specialist from the city. We fear an operation is unavoidable, and desire the benefit of your skill.—Sincerely yours,
> Estelle Morris.

Jarvis had many other notes with that signature hidden away in his private drawer. Estelle Morris had never taken the trouble to ask for her letters, when she had sent him his curt dismissal two years ago. How faithfully he had loved and served her, how he had worked and economised, and strained every nerve to hurry through college, that he might begin the life struggle for fame and fortune that should bring him his heart's desire! She had seemed to return all this passionate devotion, and they had been sworn lovers. Would she wait for him? How often she had told him so, the full, white lids drooping over her soft, shining eyes.

Then, three years ago, a sudden change of fortune had come to her mother. They went abroad, and after a few months her letters altered in tone. Finally, there came a short, cool epistle. "She did not love him," she said. "It was wrong to marry without love, and so—good-bye." In silence, in anger, and in bitter despair he had accepted his fate.

Estelle had come back to England, the promise of her girlhood magnificently fulfilled in the beautiful woman who dazzled the quiet old village. She had many courtiers, and she had chosen the richest of them—a man many years older than herself. The engagement had been proclaimed far and wide. All summer long, from his office window, Jarvis had watched her drive by, benignly arrogant and radiantly handsome. A few days ago he had heard that her future husband was seriously ill. To-day this letter had come. Should he go?

He longed with an intense longing, born of his youth and wounded pride, to show her that he was indifferent to her insult, cold to her neglect. If a half-defined instinct warned him that neither his anger nor his contempt might be proof against the deadly power of the old love, he crushed it, as he crushed the letter in his hand. Go he would, and the future might take care of itself.

The first meeting was easy enough. Jarvis' cold politeness was accepted without a trace of embarrassment.

"Oh, Dr. Jarvis," said Estelle, "it is more than kind of you to come. We hear so much of your skill, and we—I am so much distressed about poor Mr. Morton. You will help him, I am sure?"

He bowed in answer. Yes, he would do his best.

He scarcely dared to look into her eyes. Did she love this old man, he wondered? At the thought, a sudden, uncontrollable hate sprang up in his heart. He fought against it desperately. Medically considered, Morton's case was intensely interesting, rousing his professional pride and surgical daring; and he knew the patient to be a gentle, sweet-natured man.

But Jarvis did not tread the downward path unaided. With all her tact and self-composure, it angered Estelle Morris that the old devoted lover, the humble suppliant of past days, should pass her with careless indifference. Without deliberate thought of the mischief she might do, she felt that she must teach him how dangerous it is to forget a woman.

Morning after morning she would meet him, ostensibly to inquire after the sick man, while the tones of her voice were full of an alluring harmony, and her eyes seemed to pray for pardon although her lips were silent. Each day Jarvis quitted the house more hopelessly miserable, more degraded in his own sight, yet eagerly longing for the hour of return, the fresh torture of her presence, the misery of her welcoming smile.

"It is all over, Miss Morris, and safely, I trust," said the famous surgeon, as he hurried downstairs. "That young Dr. Jarvis helped me wonderfully. I prophesy that he will make his mark. I am quite content to leave the case in his hands. Unless there is more heart trouble than we think, Mr. Morton will rally, and be a happy man yet," he added with a chivalric bow.

Estelle thanked him profusely, and stood listening in the hall until the sound of his carriage wheels died away. Then she swiftly glided up the long staircase. In a small anteroom, next to the sick chamber, she found the nurse and the doctor.

Jarvis was dropping some liquid into a glass and started at her entrance. In his nervous manner and white face were plainly visible the strain and excitement of the great surgical crisis he had just witnessed. His hand trembled. He was horribly conscious of her presence.

She stood by the curtained door, her slender figure outlined against the sombre velvet.

"Dr. Linyard tells me," she began, "how much we owe to you and your skill. You are so kind"—her voice grew low—"so generous."

The doctor's hand grew more unsteady. "I will bring this in presently," he said, turning to the nurse.

The woman softly slipped away, and the two faced each other. White and haggard, Jarvis gazed at Estelle. Every fibre of his body seemed to thrill under the look she returned to his.

"Harry," she said, "for the sake of old times, will you forgive me? I know now how badly I treated you, but girls are fools, and——"

He sprang from his chair, the tightly tensioned cord of self-restraint snapping as she spoke.

"What do you mean?" he asked, coming closer to Estelle.

"I only want to be friends once more," she murmured.

But her white fingers had pulled the flood gates too far apart. Jarvis caught her in his arms and clasped her almost savagely. She pushed him aside angrily; yet she listened to his pleading.

"Do you care for this old man? Is the old love dead? Sweetheart, listen to me," he said, passionately.

"How can I listen to you?" she answered, all her diplomacy on guard again. "I have promised to marry Mr. Morton." With a slightly melodramatic sigh she went on, "I am bound by circumstances, but, Harry, I cannot bear to have you hate me. Indeed, it breaks my heart. You will forgive me?"

She paused, for some subtle danger threatened in his face; and turning, she vanished from the room. A few minutes later, as she stood before her long mirror, carefully twisting her heavy coils of chestnut hair, she smiled exultantly at the face in the glass.

Meanwhile, Jarvis sat stiff and silent, mechanically dropping the medicine he was preparing into the glass before him. It was a powerful anodyne; and as Jarvis held the bottle a sudden deadly inspiration seized him. She had promised to marry the old man. If he were dead——

Drop by drop the liquid fell into the glass. Now, the dose was large enough for a healthy organism; now it had passed the limit; now—Jarvis stopped. The nurse stood by the door.

"He is sleeping, doctor," and she took the glass from him. "I am to give him this as you directed, when he wakes, the first dose?"

He did not look at her face. "Yes," he said, and left the room.

In the street outside he met a boy, breathless and excited.

"Doctor," the lad called, "come quickly! There's been a big accident down at the mill. They think Jim Corrigan is killed."

Jarvis hurried away, and in fifteen minutes was fighting for the second time that day the strange, cold mystery of death. There was little time for thought now. On the floor of the mill, surrounded by weeping women, and rough, yet sympathetic men, he exerted his skill, and struggled desperately to save the life of the young Irishman. After some hours of hard work he was again successful, and finally helped to carry the patient to his own house. It was late when Jarvis entered his study and saw the supper his sister had prepared waiting for him on the little table. Worn with excitement, cold, hungry, and exhausted, he ate voraciously, and soon sank into a heavy sleep.

A little after midnight he awoke with a start. The fire was low, the room chilly, and his madness was past. An unspeakable horror came upon him as he remembered his day's work. By this time Morton must be dead. He paced the room in agony, but there was no woman's face to charm and lure him now; only the cold air, the silence, the darkness, which seemed to wrap him in on every side. Surely it must be a dream, this hideous memory of a trust betrayed.

He wondered why they did not come hurrying after him to call him to look at the dead. He strained his ears to listen, expectant, yet alarmed at every distant sound. He could see Morton's face, as he knew it must look, cold and white! Even when he tried to think of Estelle the dead face rose menacingly before him, blotting out every other thought.

Jarvis was the descendant of an honourable race. His nature, naturally weak and sensitive, had been strengthened by an old-fashioned, provincial education, and a simple country life. As the temptation died away, conscience asserted its power, and remorse and horror overcame him. Was there any escape? Yes, one, cowardly as it was, and he slowly moved towards the box where his pistols were. Then he started with a cry, for the door opened and his sister came in. He knew her husband was away, and wondered if her baby was ill, for she held it in her arms.

"You poor boy! How worn and miserable you look, and what a day you have had of it!" she said. "You came in so late, your supper must have been stone cold. I have been upstairs, hearing you tramp up and down here, until I decided to come down and drive you to bed; and baby, little rascal, would come too."

Jarvis watched them stolidly—the mother's pure and gentle face and white, caressing hands, the baby's rosy cheeks and darkly sparkling eyes. This was his only sister. She loved and honoured him. Suppose she knew!

"How is Mr. Morton?" she asked, suddenly.

"Dead by this time," he answered, harshly.

She played with the baby's curls and said slowly, "I am sorry. You and the surgeon have worked so hard; but after all he has been spared much unhappiness, for," she went on hesitatingly, "Estelle Morris cannot help it, perhaps, but she is a heartless girl. I was thankful enough two years ago when—forgive me, Harry, is it possible you love her still?"

"Love? If you call it that," Jarvis answered, wildly. "For her sake I have done murder—murder, do you hear? Do not look at me so. Take the child away. Go, go!"

She stared at him, unbelief and horror mingled in her gaze.

"Murder? Impossible!"

"It is true," he went on ruthlessly, but with a sense of grim relief. "After the operation this afternoon, Linyard left. Morton showed signs of fever. I gave him aconite. I gave enough to kill three ordinary men. There's no doubt about it; he's dead by this time."

Helen gave a low cry, and seemed to shrink and grow older before his eyes. There was a long silence. The baby played with the ribbons of her gown, and Jarvis realised that his cup of punishment was full. He knew he had slain the future happiness of this tender, loving woman in confessing a crime which he need never have revealed.

His sister stirred at last, a momentary gleam of anger flashing in her eyes. "She tempted you—I know it," she cried; then her head drooped, and with a flood of tears she crept out of the room. Again Jarvis was alone.

As he expected, the summons came in the early dawn. He heard the wheels of the carriage outside, and opened the door himself to the sleepy servant who stumbled up the steps.

"We want you to come up to the house, sir. Mr. Morton is dead."

"Yes," said Jarvis. "When?"

"Last night, sir. I was coming after you, but I heard you were gone to the mill, and Mrs. Morris said wait till morning."

Jarvis led the way out, and they drove through the sleeping town. He, too, was as one dead, for his youth, his ambition, his desire for life, and the mad love that had caused his ruin—all these were gone from him for ever. This, then, was to be his punishment—this misery of hopeless remorse; yet, as he shuddered before the thought of the future, he acknowledged the eternal justice of God.

They reached the house at last. With a supreme effort of will Jarvis entered the dark hall. At the top of the stairs the nurse met him. She greeted him nervously. "Oh, doctor, after all your trouble, to think he should die this way—so soon, too!"

"When?" said Jarvis.

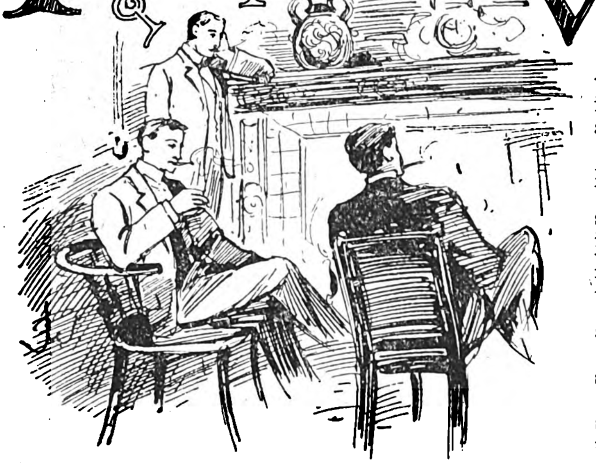
"Last night, about seven o'clock, and—I must tell you, doctor, for I have rather worried over it. He was sleeping so nicely, I did not disturb him at first; and by accident—I never did such a thing before—I upset one of the medicines you left—the fever medicine. We were just going to send for you when he gave a sigh, and all in an instant he was dead. Perhaps if I had given him the medicine——"

She paused in surprise, for the doctor leant forward, and took her hand suddenly in his.

"I think," he said, "I think it was the will of God."

M. W.

PRAYING FOR WEALTH



THE conversation was getting intensely interesting in the smoking-room of the Brighton Metropole. The subject under discussion was an uncommon one, dealing as it did, with the efficacy of prayer.

"I remember when I was a boy," said a stout commercial, removing the cigar from his mouth, and staring at the chandelier overhead, "I remember once chasing a butterfly for two miles, over a heath, in order to capture it for my collection. It was a magnificent specimen, perfectly marked, and of more than ordinary size. But, despite my persistent efforts, it eluded my net for nearly an hour, and finally disappeared in some mysterious way altogether.

"I remember throwing myself impetuously on the rugged heather and crying heartily over its loss; but, being then of a rather religious turn of mind, I found solace in a boyish prayer that I might eventually secure it. When I got up, the butterfly was hovering over my head, and the next moment it was safely within the little specimen box I carried."

The speaker looked round upon the silent company, and watched the impression of his story.

"A coincidence; a mere coincidence," said a small, sharp-featured man, sipping his whiskey.

"You are wrong, friend," returned the commercial, stolidly. "I regard it as a most striking illustration of the efficacy of an earnest and heartfelt prayer."

The short silence which followed was broken by a clean-shaven, lean man, who spoke with a strong American accent.

"It may, or it may not interest you, gentlemen, to hear an experience I had some twenty years ago in America, which appears to me to, in a measure, support the theory of my worthy friend here who has just given his experience. Would you like to hear it?"

A murmured acquiescence, and a rustling of chairs, as the company settled down to listen, followed; and the American began:

"It was in the winter of '75, and I was carrying mail from Gorman's, over to the Brown Bear and Roundout camps, and made the round trip once a week on snow-shoes. When I was at Gorman's, which was four days in the week, I stopped with a Frenchman named Pirot, who worked a mine on the river. We shared a cabin at the back of the hotel, and got along middling well for the first month we were together. In the evening we'd generally turn up at the hotel, and after sitting by the fire with the rest in the saloon for a while, we'd finally drop into old Gorman's private parlour, and listen to Kitty Gorman playing on the organ. I always liked music, but I had no faculty at producing it, so I'd just sit and listen while Kitty would play, and Pirot, who had a good voice, would now and then sing to Kitty's accompaniment.

"This was all well enough at first, but after two or three weeks I found it dull and uninteresting, sitting there by myself on the cold, slippery, black hair-cloth sofa, with never a word nor a chance for one with Kitty, who seemed all taken up with Pirot and the music, and only would speak to me when she wanted another stick on the fire. Then, after a while, I stopped going into the parlour, and would sit in the saloon till bed-time, feeling as cross as I could be to hear Pirot singing and Kitty playing away for dear life to keep up with him on the old organ in the next room.

"Then I grew bitter, because I knew that, while naturally Kitty liked me best of the two, at the same time she was worldly-minded, like her father, old Gorman, and felt Pirot was a better match on account of his river claim, while I wasn't of much account, from a ready-money point of view. Then, of course, I had a falling-out with Pirot about nothing in particular on the surface, as I can recollect of. I did pretty much all the quarrelling, I must admit, for Pirot said nothing but just laughed in a way that made me more angry, and I moved out of the cabin to an old adobe higher up the hill.

"Next day I started off before sunrise on my regular trip with the mail for Brown Bear and Roundout. I always got the best start I could, so as to get up the range while the crust was hard, and before the sun had been up long enough to make it too hot for me, for I wasn't very handy even yet with the long Norwegian snow-shoes. I never stopped on the trip, being always more anxious to get through than to rest; but this particular morning I had started out feeling languid and dispirited, and by the time I'd reached the summit I felt dead beat. My feet were cold and cramped from too tight buckling of the shoes, and altogether I made up my mind to sit down for a minute or two and get pulled together again before I started on.

"There wasn't much wind, and the sun was out warm and comfortable, and the idea of stretching out there on the snow for ten minutes' rest just suited me. I sat down with my back resting against an old dead stump that came up through the snow, unbuckled the shoes, unslung the mail-pouch from my shoulder, and took out the little snack of bread and meat I'd brought along, and which I generally ate on the way, without making any special stop for it.

"While I was eating, looking down the slope I had just climbed up, and thinking what bad luck I'd had during the last few months, my eye caught some lines in the scrap of newspaper I'd wrapped round my lunch, and which was lying out on my leg, under the second piece of bread, just within good reading distance. I don't just recollect now how the words read, but the drift of it was that lots of men failed in getting what they wanted in this world, just because they didn't want it hard enough, and didn't keep asking and praying for it until they got it.

"Those lines, somehow, applied to my case, it seemed to me. I hadn't had much early religious training, and the idea of praying hard for what you wanted and getting it, struck me as something new and simple and very satisfactory. There was no end of things I wanted, and wanted badly, and if they were to be had by just wanting them badly enough, and asking for them hard enough, I was going to get them.

"Then I said to myself, why not start now with a silent prayer? So I set at it. I closed my eyes and squeezed my lids together hard—I was so dead in earnest. It was a terrible, sweeping, vigorous prayer. First, I wanted good luck in a general way, and asked for it hard. Then I got more down to particulars, and asked to be rich and prosperous, and wound up with a sort of incidental suggestion that it would suit me down to the ground to have Pirot fall off his luck and get poor, while I grew rich. All this wasn't right, of course, as I see now. But I wasn't so much praying for bad luck to Pirot for its own sake, as for the effect of it all on my getting on with Kitty Gorman.

"When I prayed for Pirot's downfall, I was so wrought up by the whole business that—just, I suppose, to give things a particular point—I kicked out my right leg so vigorously, and struck the snow-shoe to which I'd buckled the mail-pouch so hard, that, zip-whizz! like a shot it was on its way down the hill. It made a clear shoot for about five hundred feet, every now and then spinning about, when an end would strike a snag, until it brought up short against a ledge that stood out across its track, sending splinters of stone all about when it struck, for with the mail-pouch buckled on to it, it picked up considerable speed, and hit hard. It bounded up and turned clean over and then stopped altogether, held from sliding any further by the croppings.

"Well, while that snowshoe was pirouetting down the slope, I was that surprised and angry that, although I'd just been indulging in prayer, I let loose a line of language which was so strong and pointed that if there had been any feeling to that snowshoe, it would have brought up within fifty feet. I mention this with regret, because I see now that if I hadn't been moved to make those remarks, just fresh on top of the prayer, things would have turned out different; but being young and hot-headed and thoughtless then, of course I didn't look ahead for consequences.

"There was nothing to do but go down to the ledge where the snowshoe lay, pick it up and the mail-pouch, and get on my way again. The ledge was rotten with the weather and pretty well broken up already, and aside from the small pieces just knocked out of it, there had been one chunk loosened up, which had rolled just away from the ledge, and lay with the fresh break turned up to the sun, and dazzling me with its brightness.

"That piece of rock was just crossed all over and through with coarse wire-gold. I stood staring at it a full minute before I could realise that I was looking at rock that would go over a £1,000 to the ton; that I was the discoverer and owner of that ledge, and that finding it just meant to me everything worth having, including, of course, first and foremost, riches and Kitty Gorman.

"While I stood there I recollected, with a start, that riches and prosperity and Kitty Gorman were what I had been praying for hard five minutes before, and here it all was within reach in answer to that prayer

Naturally I was somewhat excited, but I kept cool enough to put up monuments and a location notice all right, and christened the claim the 'Heavenly Snowshoe,' as being appropriate to the situation.

"You can imagine I wasn't very anxious after this to keep on with the mail to Brown Bear and Roundout. I wanted to get back to Gorman's, and let them know about the discovery. So I climbed up the hill again for the other shoe, knocked off some good specimens to show what I'd found, and was back again at Gorman's a little after sunset.

"When I went down to the hotel after I'd cooked supper and cleaned up at the adobe, I could hear Pirot singing and Kitty playing the accompaniments as usual; but instead of riling me, as it had all along, I just laughed to myself when I thought of the 'Heavenly Snowshoe,' and of how quickly all this would be knocked on the head when Kitty and old Gorman learnt of my good luck. I went into the saloon first, where I could generally count on finding the old man of an evening; but they said he was in the parlour with Pirot and Kitty listening to the music.

"When I went in, after knocking, they all looked surprised, and didn't seem very pleased; but I knew what had come to me, and what was coming to Pirot, and didn't mind, but began and told him what I'd found, and opened up my flour-sack I'd brought my specimens down in, and laid them all out on the table under the light of the hanging lamp, where they showed up richer than any specimens I ever saw. They all got round the table and admired them, and Kitty was very friendly, and old Gorman got very much interested and excited over it all, although he was generally pretty cold-blooded about most things.

"There wasn't any more singing or playing that evening, and pretty quickly Pirot said good-night and left us, not looking cheerful. Old Gorman asked me all kinds of questions about the size and dip of the ledge, and the nature of the croppings, and Kitty sat by the table, and was brighter and chattier than I'd seen her in a month. When I told the old man I'd locate him in with me on the claim he was delighted, and we arranged to meet next morning and talk up the best way of dealing with the property. Then at last we said good-night, and I went up to my adobe feeling very satisfied at the style in which my prayer was working.

"Next day old Gorman and I had our talk out, and it was settled between us that we were to locate extensions of the 'Snowshoe,' start in developing and incorporating the whole business at once, setting aside part of the stock for what old Gorman called a 'working capital,' and, meantime, the old man was to put up for expenses. Things went on almost too smoothly for the next month. The ledge opened up very nicely, Kitty was more friendly every day, and as for Pirot, he never turned up nowadays—anyhow, when I was about.

"Now my folks at home had been writing on an average once every six months for the last five years, urging me to come home and see them before they all died; but I'd never had any means to go, or any way to get any up to now. But when another letter came about this time, still nagging me to come on, I showed it to old Gorman, for he and I had got to be very friendly, and he said I ought to go, and he'd lend me the money to go with, and look after things while I was gone. The old man kept his word; he did look after things, as you'll see.

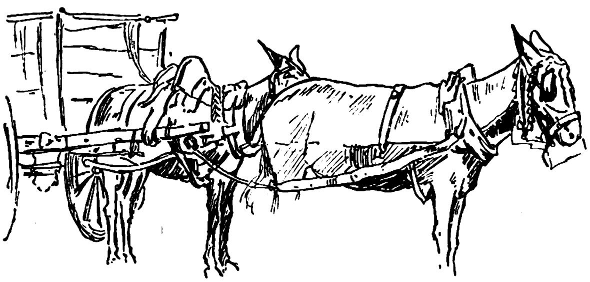
"Well, this was in April. I got back and saw the folks, took a little general *passear* all round, and it was August before I arrived one evening on the stage at Gorman's again. At the first glance, before I got down, I could see there'd been some considerable changes in the hotel since I'd been gone. The main building had been repainted, and there was a complete new outfit of red settees in the front porch. A strange man, with the air of owning the whole plant, came out from the office, and there was no sign of old Gorman or Kitty standing in the front door, as was usual when the stage came in.

"I felt a sinking at the heart at all this, as though something bad was going to happen to me. I wasn't kept long in doubt, though, about the state of things. I hadn't been off the stage five minutes when I learnt it all. Quickly as I'd left, old Gorman sold Pirot all the 'working capital' as a starter. Then between them they worked up a scheme to sell me out on a delinquent assessment. Then they struck an English syndicate and sold out the property at a big figure. Next thing, Kitty became Mrs. Pirot, old Gorman closed the hotel, and the three disappeared for no one knew where.

"Well, I won't dwell on my feelings, or how I expressed them when I heard all this and found it true; but that's neither here nor there. I could see, after I'd cooled down and reflected, just how it all came about. I'd spoiled everything up there on the summit by asking for bad luck to strike Pirot, and by using the pointed language I've referred to so close on top of my prayer when the showshoe went waltzing down the hill.

"This, I think," concluded the American, as he rose, "will illustrate my remark, that while there's nothing prayer won't do, if you're really in earnest and pray hard enough, at the same time it's just as true that if you overload your prayer, or show temper on the top of it, it's just bound to go balky and make trouble for you."

A. Maitland.



THE OUTLAWS' TREASURE

SUMMARY.

The mail train has been robbed between Cornwall and La Grange stations, and £20,000 worth of gold stolen by a gang of desperadoes, headed by two brothers names Mulligan. Two passengers on the train—Adolph Squirrek, *alias* Smith, a detective tracking the Mulligans, and Fred Weldon, a young lawyer—who had struck up an acquaintance on the way, alight at Somerville, where the former stopped at the "Drover," and the latter at his mother's house. During the night a message comes to say that Judge Woodland's horse has come back alone, and Weldon, together with Squirrek and two other men, set out to find him, and discover one of Mulligan's confederates lying senseless on the road. The man, who had made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the judge, is sentenced to forty years' imprisonment. At Judge Woodland's Weldon meets a Spaniard named Alvarido Almanaz, and the two men become rivals for the love of Florence, the judge's daughter. Weldon is inveigled to a lonely bridge near Cornwall, and disappears. Squirrek pays a fruitless visit to the spot. Squirrek arouses the citizens of Cornwall, who make their way to the outlaw's hiding-place. One outlaw is found and killed, and the cabin is set fire to. Squirrek discovers a piece of paper with the following cryptogram: "1——0——1. Cfujk't Bsdfj 50zct Mpqug Vmeds sid X gjsf Nbg." He afterwards falls in with the two remaining outlaws, and has them arrested. They are lynched by a furious mob. Both Florence Woodland and her father have dreams of Señor Almanaz in connection with Fred Weldon's disappearance. The Señor leaves Somerville professedly for Cuba. He writes from Chicago to Miss Woodland, asking for a solution to the cryptogram. This is sent, but is intercepted by Squirrek, who has been tracking the Señor, and who at last discovers Fred Weldon, more dead than alive.

CHAPTER XXVII.

(From the Journal of Frederick Weldon.)

WHAT HAPPENED AT DEVIL'S CREEK.

On the —th of October a telegram reached my office in Brampton, purporting to be sent by my friend, Detective Squirrek, requesting me to meet him that night near the High Bridge, which spans the Devil's Creek, between Cornwall and La Grange.

Without the slightest suspicion of the authenticity of the message, I took the eastward-bound train, just as night was closing in, and shortly after stepped out of the station at Cornwall, and started on foot for the bridge, which was several miles distant.

The night was clear, and a bright moon was in the sky, so that I had no difficulty in making my way along the track.

When about half the distance was passed, I encountered the express, which thundered by with a shock like that of an earthquake. I caught a passing glimpse of several figures standing upon the platforms of the cars as they shot by, and I fancied that one of them shouted to me, but it must have been only a fancy.

Resuming my journey, I walked rapidly along the railway, and shortly after came in sight of the skeleton-like structure known as High Bridge, but saw nothing of any person.

For the first time a suspicion flashed through my mind that I was wandering into a snare, and I slackened my footsteps and walked more carefully, as if afraid of being heard.

My uneasiness was not diminished when I heard footsteps behind me, and looking over my shoulder, saw two men a few yards distant coming towards me.

I felt myself in a predicament. I could not continue walking directly ahead, as it was too dangerous to cross the bridge, while I instinctively shrank from turning either to the right or left, and descending into the dark swampy valley.

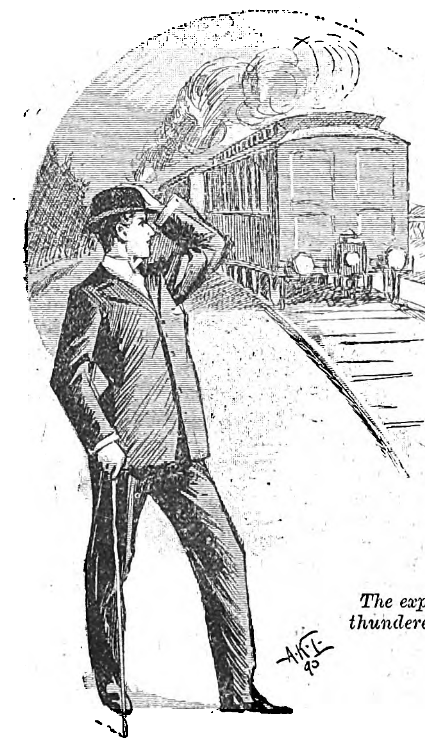
The only thing that remained for me was to turn about and boldly face my pursuers as though I suspected no danger, and I still hoped my fears were unfounded.

I walked slowly forward until I came to the very edge of the structure, when, placing my hand upon the revolver, and holding it ready to whip out at an instant's warning, I turned squarely about, and began my retreat, or more properly my advance.

By this time less than a hundred feet separated the two men from me. They were walking side by side, and I heard one of them say something in a low tone at the moment I turned about.

When we had approached somewhat closer I was not a little astonished to observe that the taller of the two was my acquaintance, Señor Almanaz.

I cannot say that this discovery was a relief. On the



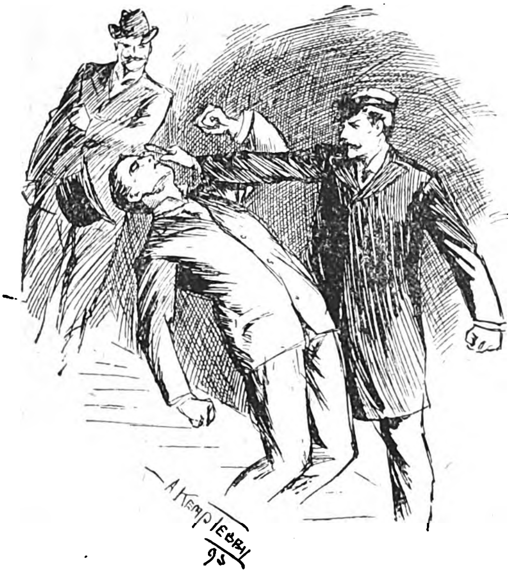
The express thundered by.

contrary, it was decidedly the reverse, as I felt that if the Cuban hated me as intensely as I did him, he would not hesitate to take every advantage of my situation.

A few seconds later we were face to face. Without either party halting the two men separated, so that I was compelled to walk directly between them.

"Good evening," said the Cuban, lifting his hat with the most ceremonious politeness.

"Good evening," said I in return; "a rather strange place for friends to encounter——"



I was struck a blow on the head.

I remember thus far, and no further. Beyond a doubt I was struck a blow on the head, which stretched me senseless upon the ground. What followed is mainly conjecture on my part; but as I lie here in bed, with barely enough strength to write, and to think cogently only at intervals, I have run back over the "shadowy past," and putting together all that I can think out for myself, with what I have been able to gather from my attendants and by surmise upon my part, I have come to the following conclusions:

After I had been felled to the ground, my assailants must have picked me up and carried me to the right of the railway track for a considerable distance until they reached a waggon road, where I was placed in a vehicle of some kind and taken a long distance over the road until I reached some house, where I remained, I suppose, for several days, so weak and vague of mind that only the slightest fragment of a recollection remains of my sojourn in that place.

Then comes a dream-like memory of the whirl and rattle of a train, which satisfies me that, as soon as I was able, I was placed in the train and taken to this place, which I judge to be Chicago from a remark or two that has been dropped in my presence.

These lines have been written at one sitting, or rather at one lying, in bed. My first impression was that my home was in a hospital, where I was under medical treatment, but this proved a mistake.

My head is bandaged up, and from the sharp pain that occasionally shoots through it, and the curious, bewildering train of thoughts, I judge that the wound must be a severe one.

Furthermore, the medical treatment I am receiving does not seem to be helping me much; but while I am able to think with some coherence, it is a relief to put my recollections upon paper, and when they fail, give free rein to fanciful conjecture and the imaginative explanation of my curious situation.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Recollections while in Bed.

Thus far I managed to write yesterday when my weakness overcame me, and I dropped back in a sort of swoon.

When I recovered, a medical-looking gentleman was sitting beside the bed, holding my wrist in his hand, and looking earnestly in my face, while a bullet-headed, repulsive man, who was addressed as Muggens stood beside him, engaged in the same occupation.

He asked me no questions, but leaving me some medicine, took his departure, first speaking a few words in a low tone to Muggens.

Before taking his draught, and while in the mood, I will sit up in bed and use my pencil, which Muggens has been kind enough to sharpen for me.

Why am I here?

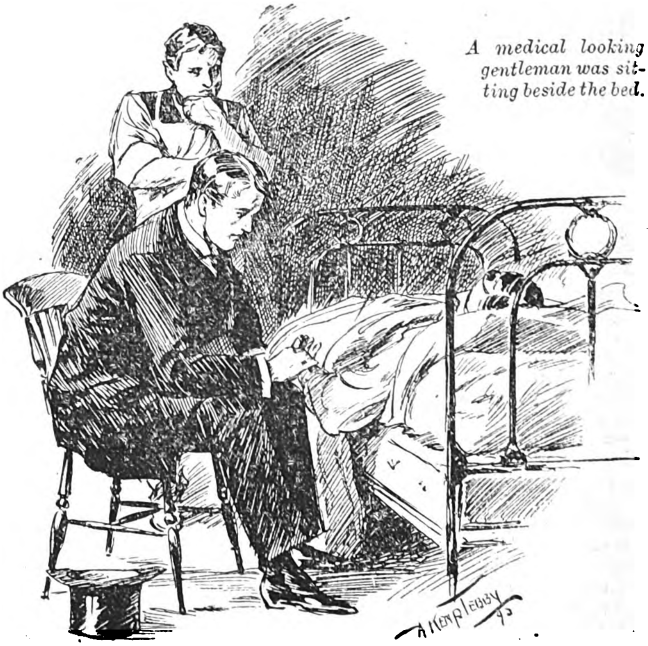
This is the question which comes up first and foremost, and the solution of which turns my head topsy-turvy.

I can't answer it. What would I not give for the cool-headed, keen-witted Squirrek at this moment! How he would unravel everything, and set me in a whirl of delight at his lightning-like explanations of everything!

Where is Squirrek? Does he know I am here? Why doesn't he come to my assistance? He cannot fail to get traces of me if he sets himself at work to do so.

And my poor mother—has she any intimation of what has befallen her son? If so, I am afraid her heart will break. Is there no way that I can reach her and the rest of my friends? Am I shut out from the world, placed here at the mercy of enemies who can work their pleasure with me without fear? Is this a prison, from which I am never to emerge except by the gate through which, sooner or later, we must all pass?

Such and similar were the questions that presented themselves in bewildering rapidity to me as I attempted clearly to reflect upon my singular situation. While thus occupied I heard footsteps approaching, and when they



A medical looking gentleman was sitting beside the bed.

were accompanied by a creaking noise I knew at once that my shadow was approaching.

The door was open, and as I turned my head to meet the new comer, he quickly withdrew his face, but not in time to prevent my seeing the sallow complexion and black eyes and moustache of Señor Alvarido Almanaz!

He, then, is my shadow; but he does not always wear creaking boots, else I would have heard him when he approached me on the railway track, and would have identified him when we occasionally met during the day at Brompton.

Almost instantly he turned, and the creaking of the footsteps grew fainter and fainter, until they died out, and I was left alone again with my journal.

Upon examining my wardrobe I found blood upon it, which probably came from my wound. None of my effects were removed; even my revolver was there, although each chamber had been carefully emptied of its charge.

How long I have been here cannot even be guessed; but it is certain that a gross outrage has been perpetrated, and if I am spared the guilty ones shall suffer.

It undoubtedly is the work of the Mulligan brothers, and it is equally certain that this suave Cuban is linked with them. He has managed my abduction, although why he did not slay me outright is more than I can understand. It would have caused him far less trouble, and what vengeance he chose to wreak upon me would then have been completed and secured without his incurring the personal risk which certainly must attend such a proceeding as bringing me so many miles here to Chicago, where my appearance could not have failed to attract attention in the train.

I cannot date my journal, for I have no idea what day of the month, or even of the week, it is. Muggens is impenetrable, and will not answer any question, or bring me a newspaper.

By paying him liberally he gave me some stationery, and took my letter, addressed to my mother, and promised to drop it in the post-office; but I don't believe he had the least intention of doing so.

The doctor, who calls once or twice a day, tells me that I am dangerously ill, and enjoins strict quiet upon me. He forbids me to read or write, but, when awake, it is impossible to avoid thinking, and what harm can there be in giving expression to my thoughts?

I wish I could free myself of the suspicion that the medicine I am taking is doing me more harm than good, but it does seem to me that I am growing steadily weaker, and sinking lower, instead of improving in health.

Perhaps it is well that this suspicion has taken possession of me.

This morning I became enraged, and demanded of the doctor and Muggens to know where I was, by what right they deprived me of the society of my friends, and what their ultimate intentions were regarding myself.

Their only answer was a warning to me to keep quiet, as excitement was highly dangerous. As if a man in my situation could prevent himself from being carried to the highest pitch of exasperation.

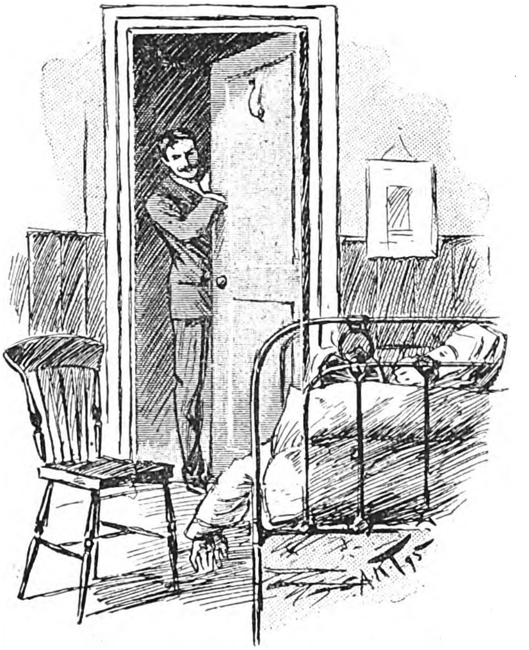
Oh, if my revolver were only loaded! What a pleasure it would be to shoot these two villains, together with the prince of criminals, the Cuban, Almanaz, whose creaking steps are frequently heard, but who never comes in, unless it be while I am slumbering! The shadow has resolved itself into a reality which is not impervious to powder and bullet.

I find that I am growing more stupid than usual, and sleeping longer and more frequently than when first brought here. The conviction fastens itself upon me that I am a victim of some species of slow poisoning, which ultimately will carry me away.

Why do not my friends come to my assistance? I have prayed earnestly to Heaven for help, and every footstep startles me into the thought that perhaps it is Squirrek.

And yet he does not come. Has he forgotten me, or does he care nothing for my welfare? Is he so engaged in running down the Mulligan brothers that he thinks I can afford to wait his pleasure?

It must be that he, in common with the others, has given me up for dead. My disappearance is such that there must be reason for their believing that to be my fate. So far as I can remember, the Mulligan gang were never in the habit of taking prisoners. When they took a dislike to a man they had a short way of disposing of him. If I cannot understand why I am still living, no one else can, unless it be Squirrek.



As I turned my head to meet the newcomer.

My head seemed somewhat clearer to-day, and I made a resolve to submit to this outrageous imprisonment no longer.

After I was left alone I summoned all my strength for the purpose of dressing myself, intending to make my way to the street, and if Mr. Muggens or the doctor attempted to thwart me, I would ascertain precisely how much strength I had left. I could kick up a rumpus at any rate, which might attract attention from the street.

Ah, me! I miscalculated sadly. The moment I stepped upon the floor I fainted and fell, and lay there until picked up and placed back by Muggens, who came in shortly after.

This little occurrence made me realise my helplessness more vividly than ever before. Without the power to walk across the room, with not voice enough to make myself heard further than the next room, what can I do?

Nothing but pray and wait.

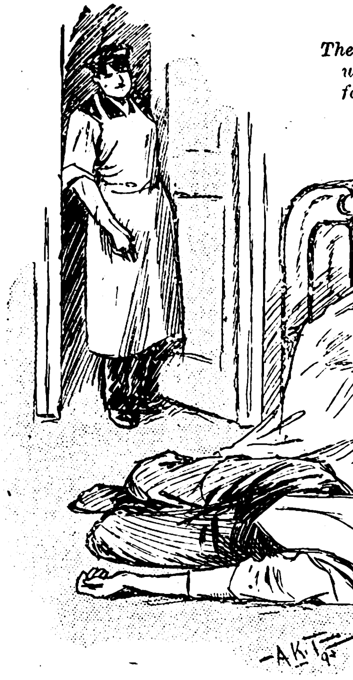
Like the old shadow, which ran me to the ground, I cannot tell how long ago, comes the conviction over me that all this medical treatment that I am undergoing is slowly and surely carrying me towards the Dark Valley.

If so, why do they hesitate? There must be some object in it, but what it is passes my comprehension, and this single fact makes me doubt somewhat my own convictions. If Señor Almanaz wished my death, and the doctor is in connivance with him, why all this delay?

Which brings back the question, Why was I ever brought to this city? Why was I not left when felled to the earth?

Again and again have my brains been racked over these questions, but with the same futile result. Heaven help me—*I will think no more about it.*

I am much weaker to-day, and my mind is still clouded. Occasional gleams of sharp mental perception, followed by blank forgetfulness, alternate with each other. I cannot finish a sentence without reading it over several times, so as to keep the connection. A great deal of what I write has no connection at all, and whoever undertakes to decipher this page will have a difficult task.



The moment I stepped upon the floor I fainted and fell.

Well, this can't last much longer. The end isn't far off. O, mother! can't you come to your boy? Come, rock me to sleep, let me lay my bursting head upon your lap, let me sleep—mother—night is closing—take my hand—lead me—O, mother!

Hark! I hear footsteps—can it be mother? No; they sound like those of Squirrek—can it be he? He comes too late.

CHAPTER XXIX.

(From the Journal of Adolph Squirrek.)

The Detective Lays a Trap for Almanaz.

It is a good many years since my blood has boiled as it has while reading over this journal of the unfortunate Fred Weldon. Up to this point I have experienced a sort of sympathy for the scamp Almanaz, and have not been particularly anxious to punish him for his rascalities.

But I mistook him; there is no punishment too severe for such a wretch, and there is none which it is in my power to inflict that I shall not visit upon him.

* * * * *

The above was all I was able to write before I proceeded to action. Now that the smoke of battle has cleared away, I can sit down calmly and write its history.

When Fred Weldon handed me his journal, and told me that I would "find it all there," he spoke the truth. One would be blind not to read the heartless revelation contained in those miserably scrawled lines.

Alvarido Almanaz was resolved on leaving the United States, but he was equally resolved before doing so to raise a large amount of money to take with him. He had several intimate confederates, besides a general connection which he maintained with the Mulligan brothers. It is plain that this gang determined on the death of the young lawyer, in consonance with their line of conduct with their enemies, but he had the intention changed to that of abduction.

The Cuban laid the trap which brought Weldon to the High Bridge, where he was stricken to the earth by a fierce blow from a life preserver (as I judged from the appearance of the wound), which came within a hair's breadth of killing him outright.

He was carried down the bank, placed in a waggon, and driven rapidly away to the house of someone, where he was kept several days, until the fever of excitement regarding his disappearance had partly subsided, when he was driven to a distant station, transported to Chicago, and put in charge of Muggens, the keeper of the restaurant.

Here my own blundering stupidity comes to the surface. By suitable inquiry, I could have gained a knowledge of this abduction, and checked it ere it was really consummated. Fred Weldon, I have reason to believe, was taken to Chicago disguised in woman's clothes, and his face carefully concealed from view.

Señor Almanaz entertained grave doubts from the first of his getting any of the immense wealth of the Mulligan brothers, and so he entered into a little scheme of his own. His plan was to take Fred Weldon to Chicago, there keep him securely concealed, under the belief that a large reward would be offered for his recovery, and then to act as a go-between, securing his own immunity from arrest at the same time.

The expected reward was not offered, and he dallied and hesitated, and all this time Fred Weldon was steadily sinking. Doctor Ruthven was a man who engaged in anything, no matter how disreputable, that gave him the requisite cash, and he hesitated not to use his utmost skill to prevent the recovery of his patient. The strong vigorous constitution of the latter would have caused him quickly to rally but for this.

In the meantime the Cuban was becoming desperate. His prisoner must either die or get well, and, if the expected reward failed to reach his hands, he meant that he should do the former. Although pretty well provided with funds at the beginning, his enormous expenses were rapidly running them down, and as poor Weldon remarked, a crisis was close at hand.

At this juncture my humble self appeared upon the scene, and it was high time that I did so.

Having found Fred Weldon alive, and made myself acquainted with his condition, I left, with my mind made up to allow no more delay.

My first proceeding was to telegraph Judge Woodland that Fred Weldon was alive, and would soon be at his home in Somerville, and requesting his daughter to break the tidings as gently as possible to his mother.

And after this I proceeded to business.

My first step was to make myself known at the police headquarters, and to ask for assistance. This was readily obtained, and just at the dusk of evening a close carriage, containing two policemen besides myself, was driven rapidly through the streets in the direction of the restaurant of Mr. Muggens.

We had quite a distance to go, and it was dark when we drew up several streets away. I observed, too, that a fine rain was falling as we stepped out upon the pavement.

We were all dressed in private clothes, and we proposed to enter the restaurant, take a few oysters, and make sure of the presence of either the doctor or Almanaz before we proceeded to anything

As we walked down the steps and pushed open the door we discovered several loungers within, some playing dominoes at a small table, with their glasses of beer beside them, while a tall countryman was swallowing bivalves so rapidly that Muggens was in a perspiration from his efforts to keep him going.

We glanced round the apartment, but none of *our* men were there.

CHAPTER XXX.

The Trap Remains Empty.

A half hour passed by, and still there were no indications of the coming of our men. By this time I began to suspect that a trick had been played upon us, and I asked Mr. Muggens to show us to a private room.

He very willingly did so, leading us into a small apartment, and turning up the small point of light into a flaring jet, he stood ready to receive our orders.

"Mr. Muggens," said I, "we wish to have a few words with you."

"All right," was his response, as he looked rather cunningly at me.

"We may as well tell you that we are three police-officers"—here his eyes opened wide, and he put on a scared look—"and we have come to take away that sick man."

"Which one?"

"The one that Señor Almanaz, the Spaniard, brought."

"Why, he isn't here!"

"Where is he?"

"They took him away this afternoon."

"Where did they take him?"

"I don't know, upon my word."

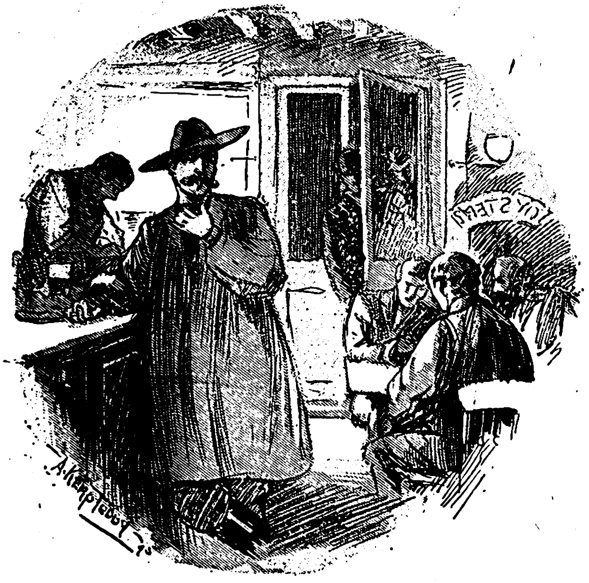
"Who carried him off?"

"Why, the Spaniard and the doctor."

"What is the doctor's name?"

"I—I don't recollect."

"Come, that won't do," said Runkle, one of my men; "we ain't so green as all that. If you can't think of the doctor's name we shall lock you up until you can polish your memory. The fact of it is, Muggens, you are mixed up in rather a bad piece of business, and the best thing you can do is to make a clean breast of everything. It may save you a great deal of trouble."

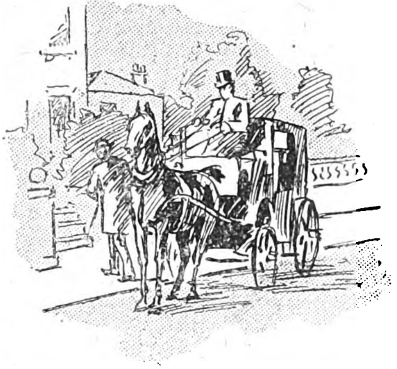


Pushed open the door and discovered several loungers within.

"Oh, I recollect—Doctor Ruthven!" exclaimed Muggens, his face lighting up, as if with the sudden inspiration.

"I know him very well," said Runkle; "he and I have met before. You are sure, Muggens, that you don't know where he has gone?"

"I would tell you, gentlemen, if I did."



It seemed a long time before we halted.

It looked as if the man spoke the truth, and we saw there was nothing more to gain in that direction; but I put a few more questions to him, which I knew he would not dare refuse to answer.

"How long ago was this sick man brought here?"

"About a couple of weeks, as near as I can remember."

"How was it that they came to bring him here?"

"I have kept Doctor Ruthven's patients once or twice, and there's one of 'em in the house this minute. He brought this young man one night, and said I *must* keep him. He wouldn't take any refusal, and so I was left no choice about it at all; but I never felt easy about it, gentlemen, and I am glad he has been taken off my hands."

"Did the doctor ever tell you his name?"

"No; that's what I didn't like about it."

"I suppose he paid you quite liberally?"

"I wouldn't have the care of another man for double the amount; the fact is, Doctor Ruthven needn't bring any more of his patients here."

The attempt to curry favour on the part of the restaurant-keeper was so transparent that it amused us.

As we rose to depart, Runkle placed his hand upon the man's shoulder, and said, half in jest and half in earnest:

"You'd better take my advice, Muggens, and close up this partnership with Doctor Ruthven. We've had our eye upon you for some time, and one of these days you'll be taking a coach drive before you know it."

A few minutes later the same three individuals who had entered the restaurant something like one hour before came out into the street. We found it raining quite hard, and it was very dark.

Runkle directed the driver, and away we went, rattling through the streets at a speed which struck me as nothing less than dangerous. Fast as we went it seemed a long time before we halted; but when my brother professional pushed open the door, and we followed him out, I recognised the neighbourhood.

It was still raining, and our clothes glistened in the lamplight as we hastily ran across the pavement and up the steps.

The bell was furiously rung, but in answer to our inquiry the servant made answer:

"Doctor Ruthven isn't in."

"Confound the luck!" exclaimed Runkle. "How soon will he be back?"

"Can't tell; perhaps in a few minutes, and perhaps not before morning. Will you come in and wait?"

While we were debating whether to accept the invitation or not, we saw the shadowy figure of a man approaching through the rain, and hoping that he might be the individual we were seeking, we waited until he came opposite.

Sure enough he was our man, and came behind us, rattling a bunch of keys in his hand; but seeing his servant standing at the door, he replaced them in his pocket.

"Good evening," he remarked, looking rather dubiously at us as he ran the gauntlet between us to reach the door. "Do you want me?"

"We will explain inside, if you please," said Runkle, shoving open the door, and walking in.

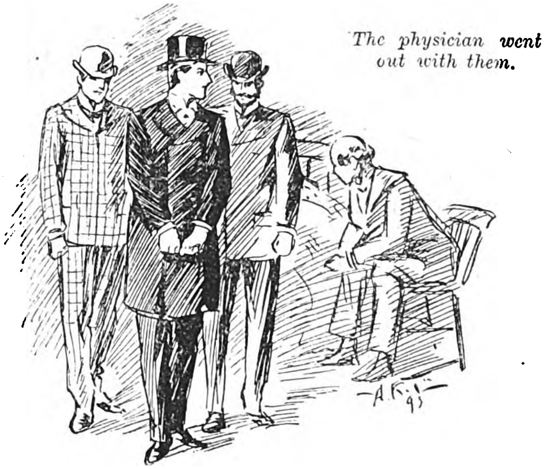
As this proceeding made the doctor the invited party, he followed, and the others brought up the rear.

Inside his office, he reached his hand up to the gas, and as it flamed up, looked sharply into our faces.

"Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" he asked, stepping back so as to face us, and coolly taking off his overcoat.

Runkle motioned to me to answer.

"You had better sit down, Doctor, as what I have to say concerns you more than it concerns us. To-day you had a call from a ministerial looking gentleman, who made some inquiries regarding the general health of Chicago. That man was a detective police officer, who was seeking out young Mr. Weldon—a patient of yours, and a friend of his—and he overheard every word that passed between you and Señor Almanaz, who called shortly after. In short, that gentleman was *myself!* From your office I went straight to Muggens' restaurant, where I found the man lying in a critical condition. The symptoms to me were that he was dying of a slow poisoning, although, not being a medical man, I cannot speak with any certainty. I remained a short time with him, and then went out for company. Early in the evening we returned, but in the meantime you and the Cuban had removed him."


The physician went out with them.

"Yes; I found he was not mending as fast as desirable, and thought it best to change his quarters."

The impudent coolness of this man commanded my admiration. He sat paring his finger nails while I was speaking, and showed not the slightest embarrassment at what I said.

"To cut our story short, we are looking for Mr. Weldon, and have come to ask you to direct us to him."

"I haven't the least objection to doing so," was the reply, uttered with the same refreshing coolness; "but the night is rather stormy ——"

"We have a carriage waiting at the door," interrupted Runkle.

"And I have several engagements," continued the doctor, "one of which is very important."

"Not more so than this," said Runkle. "We cannot excuse you."

"Very well; as you seem greatly interested I will do my my best to serve you. I must speak a moment to my servant," he added, rising hastily and walking to the door.

There was some reason to suspect a trick, and the instant he passed into the hall I stationed myself near the door so as to dart out and intercept him if he made any attempt to leave.

But he halted very near me, and spoke a few rapid words to someone, who made an indistinct reply. Then, as the doctor came back, smiling and polite, we heard the door open and someone pass out.

"Who is that?" I asked, with an uncomfortable suspicion that some game was being played upon us.

"Merely my servant. I have sent him to ask Doctor Barnes to take my place in the consultation that I was to attend this evening."

"Do you propose to wait his return?" I asked.

"It is not necessary. I am ready to accompany you," he replied, drawing on his gloves. "Fortunately we have not a great way to go."

We passed out into the misty rain, where a surprise and disappointment awaited us. The carriage was gone!

An exclamation of fury escaped Runkle.

"That stupid blockhead! he must be afraid the rain will hurt him. Well, we shall have to take it afoot."

Immediately after Doctor Ruthven's servant passed out of the door, I fancied I heard the near roll of carriage wheels, and I then suspected what afterwards proved the truth. The fellow, at the suggestion of the physician himself, made the driver believe that our party had sent him out upon some important errand, and had taken this means of warning the Cuban of his danger.

On this point we had been outwitted, and my two brother professionals held the same suspicions that I did, although neither gave any expression to it.

Doctor Ruthven, as a matter of course, took the lead, and ur nocturnal tramp began.

After leading us through several dark, winding streets, he abruptly halted, and exclaimed:

"By George! I've gone astray."

"Where do you wish to go to?" inquired Runkle.

"No. 19, Blankton Street, I believe is the place."

"If you had told me that when we started out I could have saved all this loss of time," muttered Runkle, who, of course, understood the ruse. "Your actions, Doctor Ruthven, show, beyond all question, that you are engaged in a criminal business. However, I'll take the place of guide, and it isn't likely this mistake will be repeated."

Runkle proved the truth of his words. In less than twenty minutes he halted in front of a restaurant, almost the counterpart of Muggens'.

"Doctor Ruthven seems to have a *penchant* for turning eating-houses into hospitals," he remarked, turning towards that individual. "Please lead the way."

A few minutes after we were in the presence of Fred Weldon, who was stretched upon a small neat cot, apparently asleep.

"I will remain with him," I said to Runkle. "Can you send me a good physician and nurse?"

"I can," was the reply, "and will do so at once; and as soon as you feel it safe to leave your friend, come to headquarters. We shall need your testimony. Doctor, will you be kind enough to accompany us?"

The question was a command, and the physician went out with them without uttering a word, while I remained by the bedside of my young friend, Frederick Weldon.

In the course of an hour, a genial, pleasant faced medical man made his appearance, accompanied by a matronly lady, who it was easy to see, without any questioning, was the nurse that was so badly needed.

(To be continued.)

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THE MISERY OF CORPULENCY.

A copy has come to hand of the just issued 18th edition of Mr. F. Cecil Russell's "Corpulency, and the Cure" (246 pages), the clever little volume which, more than anything else, has brought a revolution in the treatment of obesity. That the still larger circulation implied by the issue of the new edition of this popular work is necessary is proved by such a paragraph as the following. It appears among the answers to correspondents in the "Dress and Fashion" column of a Sunday newspaper with a large circulation: "Miserable.—A young girl of 18 ought not to have such a large stomach that no dress looks well. Perhaps you require exercise and dieting." The helpless vagueness of this reply to a young girl who is naturally "miserable" on account of her unseemly obesity is a sufficient evidence that Mr. Russell does well in seeking to make known, even more widely than they are at present, the simplicity, the efficiency, the rapidity, and the delightful surroundings of his treatment for the reduction of superabundant fat. The young girl in question, who might exercise and diet herself for months without any appreciable improvement, may easily learn to imitate the example of thousands of ladies of all ages, who, by the use of Mr. Russell's pure vegetable preparation, have reduced their weight at the rate of pounds per week, and sometimes (but only when necessary, for the working of the cure is virtually automatic, stopping its effects when the normal limit is reached) stones per month. She may acquire this open secret—for the author makes no mystery about the ingredients of his recipe, by sending six penny stamps to Mr. Russell's offices, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., when a copy of the book will be sent post free. If she follows his instructions, "Miserable," without any fasting regimen, and without excessive exercise, will find herself being quickly reduced to shapely proportions, with an improved appetite, and full liberty to gratify it.

LONGEVITY AND CORPULENCY.

We have received a copy of the just issued 18th edition of Mr. F. Cecil Russell's "Corpulency, and the Cure" (Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.). This issue is in itself indicative of the widespread influence which the author now exercises as a successful expert in the treatment of obesity, while the additions to the evidence which, as a statistician, he is in the habit of collecting on the subject are suggestive of some curious reflections. It is evident that Mr. Russell is annually treating thousands of cases of excessive fat with a success which, in the rapidity and the permanence of its manifestation is truly marvellous. That the enormous popularity of his system is likely to increase in the future is most probable, because it is free from all the drawbacks which have rendered the Banting and other methods of reducing corpulence unacceptable to the majority of the sufferers, who have regarded these cures as rather worse than the complaint. By attacking the causes rather than the symptoms of obesity, he strengthens the digestive organs, thus actually increasing, instead of decreasing, the appetite, while the surplus weight is being reduced at a wonderfully rapid rate, amounting to pounds per week, and often stones per month. Add to this that there is no mystery about the nature of the absolutely innoculous preparation, the recipe for which Mr. Russell supplies in his capital little volume (256 pages), which may be obtained post free by sending six penny stamps to the author's offices, at the address given above. It seems certain, therefore, that, as a result of the happy revolution which the patient research of this specialist, with the aid of a distinguished physician as a collaborateur, has effected, the average of longevity will, before long, be appreciably raised. Obesity is, indeed, one of the few antagonistic influences remaining which, especially among the more prosperous classes, prevent the great majority of people of both sexes becoming centenarians. With advanced ideas in regard to wholesome food, clothing, and sanitary arrangements, it only remains to get rid of clogging fat to live an ideally hygienic, and therefore, a very prolonged life.

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No. 347. FOR WEEK ENDING AUGUST 24TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

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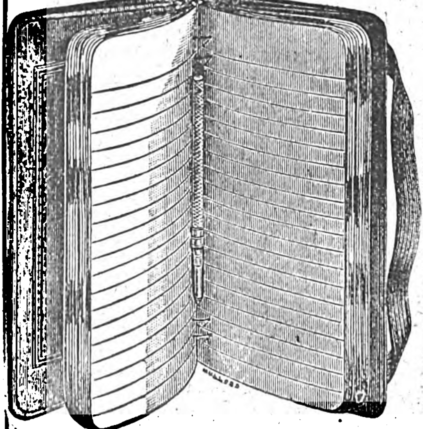

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No. 347.] [ONE PENNY.

EDITED BY

C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

For the Week ending August 24th, 1895.

Reforming * a * Lover.

MARGARET BARTRAM was trying hard to understand her own heart, and was talking freely to Kilby Brooke. They had drawn their chairs close to the open fire, turning their backs on the snowy streets which the parted damask curtains showed under a cold afternoon's sun.

"You see, Kilby, I am loved to quite an extravagant degree. It is pleasant to be loved. I have always felt in harmony with St. Augustine since I came across his confession that he was in love with being loved. To be no less frank, so am I. It may be that that was before he became a saint," she added, reflectively, "but no matter. Now, I want to choose the best love that I can get—something that will satisfy me all my life long. What do you think of Lucien Hargreve, to begin with? He is a bric-à-bracky sort of man, you know; ornamental, always going in for the unique and the beautiful. He works hard for me, Kilby, he really does. And there is no end to his versatility. Now it is a book, or a box of flowers, or some happy suggestion for an afternoon or evening—or it may be an exquisite letter marked "special," to tell me that he loves me. It must cost him a pretty sum just for messengers."

Margaret laughed. Kilby looked as if he was thinking hard, his brow fixed in a reflective frown.

"But, Kilby, I love to be sought after and waited upon—my passing words treated as things of importance—and I don't want it to be a matter of six months or a year, but for my lifetime. Now, if I should marry Lucien, there would be a stop to the messengers and things. He would naturally come to the end of his resources in the course of time, and as his surprises are his chief charm, there would be nothing left."

Kilby looked relieved, and unbent his brow a little. Margaret went on discursively from one admirer to another, striking off their characteristics with a careless but unerring touch, laughing at them all, her mind showing the variability of the magnetic needle before it has found its true direction. Kilby sat quite silent, his face showing that he was intently considering the eligibility of the different aspirants to Margaret's affections as they were separately brought before him. He seemed to relax, mind and body, when Margaret said, with a glance at the clock: "But it is time for me to dress. Thank you so much for helping me to think. Somehow you always make things plain to me. If you care to wait, you may see my new gown."

"I will wait," Kilby said, and reseated himself as Margaret left the room. It was a matter of vital importance to him what Margaret should wear. He smoothed his glossy dark hair, parted evenly down the middle, away from his serene white forehead, flicked off a speck of dust from his trousers, and took out a cigar. For an hour he sat before the fire, smoking thoughtfully.

When Margaret returned, her exquisite neck showing white and graceful above the new gown, the colour deepened in the clear olive cheeks, the finely curved mouth red with health and vigour, she said: "Now, Kilby, don't say that I look beautiful. You always say that. Lucien Hargreve would convey the idea that I was a vision

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of loveliness without so much as a definite word. That is what one calls charm. You have absolutely no charm. You are too matter of fact. You suggest nothing to the imagination. You have no mysterious reserves."

"Oh, I say, Margaret, don't talk like that to me. Keep it for Hargreve. He will know what you mean."

Margaret saw that Kilby was teased, and said good-naturedly: "Oh well, dear, we won't quarrel. You will insist on being yourself. You are nothing if not Kilby Brooke. You are such an absurd creature, that if you did not take yourself seriously you might be laughed at. Do you want to go with me into the carriage? I can drop you at your street corner. Or would you prefer to stay and take dinner with father or mother? They would be glad to have you."

"I will go with you." He put on his overcoat and followed Margaret to her carriage.

Three years before Brooke had asked Margaret to marry him. She refused him, and he went down with a low fever. When he recovered he went back to Margaret like some poor faithful dumb creature, to the hand that had struck it. She permitted him to take his old place, because she thought that a man who had had a low fever on her account was entitled to some consideration. One of his friends said to him: "The next time it will be brain fever, Kilby."

"There won't be any next time," Kilby replied.

"Oh, then, you are sure that she won't refuse you again?"

"Miss Bartram will not refuse me again," Kilby said in his slow, sententious way, "because I shall not ask her again."

Not a day passed but Kilby was at the Bartrams', if only for half an hour. He did not often see Margaret alone, but he was satisfied if he only saw her at a distance, or could talk to some one who knew her.

Kilby had other trials besides those which his loving cost him. When he came of age, which occurred two or three years ago, his allowance was stopped, he was plunged into mercantile business on the sink or swim principle, and told to strike out for himself. That was Mr. Brooke's idea of making a man of his only son. Kilby tried honestly to come up to his father's expectations, but his salary was wholly inadequate to supply what he had learned to regard as the necessaries of life. His debts piled up and up, and when they reached a certain point they periodically toppled over, and bore him down under their accumulated weight. The last crash had been so terrific that Mr. Brooke was forced to come to his son's rescue. The stern old man sat before the pile of bills; Kilby stood there, very grave, very dignified.

"Your tailors' bills I expected to have to pay—it would be too much to ask you to clothe yourself," Mr. Brooke said, with biting sarcasm, turning over the discreditable pile of paper, "but flowers at thirty shillings a dozen, two or three times a week, seem to me an extravagance which I should not be called upon to settle. And confections—look at this bill. The girl must live on confections—of course, it is Margaret Bartram. Really, Kilby, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Kilby looked depressed. He was sorry, but he did not see how he could help it. Margaret had to have those things—that was all about it.

"Well, I will help you out this time. But the next time they may sue you, do your hear?"

The fact was that had not the bills expressed Kilby's devotion to Margaret Bartram, it would have gone much worse with him. Mr. Brooke looked upon Kilby's love for Margaret as his one saving grace, and he secretly cherished the hope that some day his worthless son might win the girl, who, even to the prim and precise old man, was hardly less admirable than Kilby thought her.

It had been some time since Kilby's last unpleasant interview with his father. He had made a weak attempt at curtailing expenses, but he could not persevere in any resolution, however worthy in itself, that so nearly affected what he considered Margaret's welfare. The bills accumulated silently and unobtrusively, like a snowstorm in a night, and one day Kilby was confronted with a scene of widespread desolation. He was blue when he called on Margaret Bartram that evening.

"What is it, Kilby? Have you had another row with your father over your debts?" Margaret asked compassionately.

"No, but there is a fine one in prospect. It will have to come, Margaret. I don't mind it so much on my own account, but the old gentleman always seems so cut up."

"It is too bad. Do you know, Kilby, I have an idea. I am going to help you to save. I know how most of the money goes, you foolish boy. Those last Gloire de Dijon were twenty-five shillings. I priced them. You told me that they cost you a mere song. You must have alluded to one of Calvé's or Melba's. But I am not going to scold."

Margaret talked to him seriously. She took his shortcomings so much to heart that he solemnly promised to try and get out of debt and live within his income. When he rose to go, he said: "By the way, I have some tickets for the opera to-morrow night. I felt so blue I had to do something."

"Oh, Kilby!" she exclaimed in a shocked voice.

"They are paid for. I don't expect to be blue every day. A fellow couldn't stand it, you know."

Margaret looked thoughtful.

"If I go with you, it must be on my own terms. There must be no carriage. We will go in the 'bus, and if you send me flowers I will throw them in the street."

"Oh, come, I am not such a beggar as that!" he exclaimed, with a look of wounded pride.

"I don't say you are. But it is to be your first lesson in saving—a mere matter of discipline, as your father would say."

Margaret saw that Kilby was really suffering when he called for her the next day and saw her in her quiet walking costume instead of the usual elaborate toilette.

"Now don't be foolish, Kilby," she said. "I think it is a great lark, and we are not to have any chaperon. Mother says she does not feel well enough to go to-night. Of course, it is the 'bus."

Margaret was never in a happier mood. She felt a peculiar sense of elation as she sat beside Kilby in the stalls in her unpretentious costume. If she had been in an analytical frame of mind, which she was not, she would have probably found that it sprang from her having come unexpectedly upon a new capacity in herself—that of self-sacrifice. She had refused a box and a carriage for this very opera to give Kilby his first lesson in saving.

When the performance was over, they were surprised to find a rainy sky and wet pavements awaiting them. They had no umbrella.

"You will have to let me get you a cab," Kilby said decidedly.

"No, I will not. It would be such a failure—our first attempt. Now, Kilby, if you love me, don't get a cab," Margaret said, almost in tears.

"But you may get your feet wet and get your death of cold," he said, in an agony of apprehension. But he was forced to let her have her own way. When the rain abated they started out, but they did not reach home until a sharp shower had caught them and wetted them thoroughly.

Margaret let Kilby pull off her wet gloves, and gave him her hand for a longer interval than usual when he said good-night, promising, with a mischievous air that mocked his solemnity, to follow minutely his urgent directions as to draughts and mustard footbaths before going to bed, and do all that she could to escape the imminent danger of pneumonia or rapid consumption.

The next day, when Kilby sent his clothes to be pressed and his hat to be ironed, he said, with a satisfied smile, "Margaret is a dear."

Margaret did not weaken in her determination to help Kilby to save. She denied herself many an invitation that she might teach Kilby to have an inexpensive evening at home. Kilby was very happy. He told Margaret that he had never suspected that the mere saving of money could become so fascinating, and that he feared that it would end in his becoming a miser. But after a while a cloud crossed his serene sky. Kilby had something on his mind. Margaret saw it in his eyes, his abstracted manner. One evening he came without the invariable flower in his buttonhole.

"Kilby," Margaret exclaimed, "what is the matter?"

"It is nothing. Let me have one of those roses. Whose are these, dear—Brown's, Hargreve's, or some other fellow's? They are lucky to be able to give them to you," he said, carefully adjusting the rose in his buttonhole, and thereby regaining somewhat of his mental equilibrium.

The truth was that Kilby was under a great strain. Margaret's birthday was approaching. He had always shown his remembrance of that sacred anniversary. This birthday must be no exception—that he was determined upon—but how to get a suitable gift without going into debt for it was a new problem. He had never done it before. He could not break his word to Margaret—that was clear. He struggled on alone under his heavy burden. He forgot his flower altogether after a while, and grew pale and thin. Margaret respected his silence and never questioned him.

On the eventful day, Margaret received a heavily-chased card-case, with the donor's compliments and best wishes for many happy returns of the day, from Mr. Kilby Brooke. When he called to express his congratulations in person, Margaret treated him with extreme frigidity, and did not mention his gift.

"Margaret, you are angry about the card-case," he said, fixing his calm, affectionate eyes upon her.

"Yes, I am. I should have sent it back were it not for the monogram. As it is, I shall never use it."

"I thought you were a man of your word. From this day I give you up entirely. You may pile up your debts mountain high for all I care."

Angry tears were in her eyes. Then she added forcibly, under an impulse to say the cruellest thing possible, "I don't see how you've got credit for it!"

"I did not—I paid for it," he said, with a deeply injured air.

"You paid for it! Where did you get the money? I suppose it's nothing to you that you promised me never to borrow again."

"I did not borrow. I saved that money, Margaret, every penny of it."

"You did! Oh, Kilby, I am so sorry. Don't you believe me?" Then after a moment's thought she said gently: "But don't you think it would have been wiser to let the money go towards clearing off the debts?"

He stared at her blankly: "Why, I did not save the money for that purpose. I saved it for the card-case. You can't eat your cake and have it," he said, as if uttering a self-evident truth.

"Tell me just how you got the money together," she said smiling, and making him sit down on the couch beside her.

"Well, there was the carriage we saved, and the sweets. Why, the money fairly piled up, dear."

Margaret looked a little mystified, but as she knew that she had not a very good head for figures, she let her doubt go unexpressed. He did not tell her that for the last month or so he had done without cigars and weekly papers (his choicest literature), and lived on two meals a day, and walked instead of paying cab fare.

It was not long before Kilby again forgot his buttonhole. He looked so despairing that Margaret asked him if he was saving up for her next birthday.

"Margaret," he said desperately, "things have come to a climax. All our efforts have gone for nothing. We might as well try to keep back the ocean with a couple of mops. I have not contracted any new debts, as you know, but that has not paid off the old ones. My creditors are getting rabid. There is nothing for me to do but leave the country—and I don't know how to go, Margaret."

His voice faltered—he recklessly smoothed his hair the wrong way, quite obliterating the even parting.

"Kilby, does your father like me?" Margaret asked in a liquid voice. (She knew quite well what Mr. Brooke thought of her.)

"Yes—only yesterday he said that he did not see how such a fine girl could tolerate such a fool as I am."

"If you should tell him that we are engaged, do you think he would be likely to help you?"

"Fast enough. He would not only settle my debts, but take me into business with him. He would believe in me then. He has said as much. But of course it is not to be thought of. I would not impose on an old gentleman like that. I have never done a dishonourable action, Margaret."

"Of course not. But I am in earnest. It would not be an engagement to be engaged, but an engagement to be married."

"Oh, it is not so bad as that! You are a dear to offer to make a sacrifice of yourself. It is just like you. But I cannot consent to it. I will get through somehow."

"You place me in a very awkward position," Margaret said, getting red. "You force me to tell you what, if you were not as blind as a bat, you could see for yourself. I love you, Kilby. I found it out long ago. So please tell your father, and if you have a pocket-comb about you, do for goodness sake comb your hair!" Kilby turned pale and faint. A cold perspiration broke through every pore and stood in drops on his forehead.

"Oh, Kilby, don't look like that! Anyone would think that I had refused you!" Margaret said in distress, putting out her hands and drawing him down beside her.

"Oh, Margaret, if you only knew!" was all that he could say. With a tremulous smile he bent over her and pressed his lips and his face against her hands, scattering Hargreve's last roses, which she wore at her belt in a crimson shower of petals about her feet.

Isabel J. Roberts.

IT CAME TO PASS

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM

SUMMARY.

Charlotte, a young girl just out of the schoolroom, is married to Raymond Peel, widower, in his forty-fifth year, notwithstanding the knowledge that his past life has been a bad one. Entering London Society, she meets at Lady Logan's a young musician, Hugh Derringer, in whom she is much interested. Mrs. Donnington-Bain, an effusive American actress, calls on her husband. She tells him that an old enemy, Dr. Lynch, is in England. Mrs. Peel meets Lynch at Sandown. She calls on her *protégé*, Hugh Derringer, to learn his history, and his doctor tells her that he is dying of consumption. When driving home she again meets Dr. Lynch, who accompanies her.

CHAPTER IV.

"I HAVE no doubt," said Charlotte, coldly, "that you are surprised at my asking you to join me. I acted on a sudden desire to question you. Why did you insult my husband? What have you against him?"

The blood was coursing rapidly through her veins, and her eyes were alight with a strange fire.

"Are you sure you wish to know?" he asked; and as he spoke she felt her hopes crumbling, and her happiness insecure.

His eyes, keen and searching, looked her through and through.

Charlotte was trembling as she replied:

"Yes. It is necessary to my future peace of mind, and I cannot for ever remain in ignorance of his past. I must learn the truth from someone. It is humiliating to seek it from a stranger, perhaps dishonourable." Her voice faltered, betraying her distress.

"Some people," said the doctor, "have almost aggressive ideas of honour."

"I will abandon the word for to-day," she declared, a hard look creeping over her face. "I ask again, what has anyone to say against Raymond Peel? When I know the worst I will defend him, but at present I am powerless."

"It is a long and painful story," replied Dr. Lynch, "and though I shudder to think you must hear it, I have no desire to screen the man whose enemy I shall be for life. Yet all I am about to tell you is the truth, 'the truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God!'"

"There is no time to lose," she said.

"You are indeed brave, Mrs. Peel, to face the bare facts, but I warn you, if you value your happiness, consider well first. Would it not be better to try and escape from these torturing doubts, and return in ignorance, content to forgive?"

"Impossible. If it kills me death would be better than a life of suspicion."

Charlotte had sealed her fate, and waited in trepidation to hear the secret. There was a pause.

"For pity's sake," she cried, "do not keep me in suspense! Whatever this revelation may be, I am prepared to face it."

"Then I must carry you back to his first marriage, of which, doubtless, you know little. His wife was an Australian, and they lived in Sydney. I was their friend. So long as he remained faithful to her she was passionately devoted to him; but I had a sister, a fair girl, young and beautiful as yourself. He loved her, and to her sorrow, poor child, she loved him in return. I cannot dwell upon the painful subject, for she was nearer and dearer to me than all else in the world—an only sister, motherless, and living under my care. God knows I would willingly have died to save her, yet absorbed with my own work I never guessed the tragedy being acted under my very eyes. I suspected nothing, until Raymond Peel's wife, discovering his infidelity, was so completely overpowered by jealousy that she practically lost her reason. She was a good woman till he woke the devil in her. Smarting from her injuries, and maddened by hatred, she robbed him of the life that had come between them. Making no secret of her ghastly crime, the murderess gloried to the last in her cold-blooded revenge, and the little sister whom I loved was sacrificed, the victim of a cruel fate!"

An exclamation of horror escaped Charlotte's blanched lips. Dr. Lynch bent his head in his hands, hiding the expression on his face.

Where had she ordered the coachman to drive? Ah! yes, she remembered now. They were turning into the Park, and the gay world masquerading in smiling guise, contrasted strangely with the bitterness of sorrow. She sat far back to avoid scrutiny, endeavouring to penetrate the space of years, and living with Raymond through that haunting chapter of his career, in which he had sinned and suffered punishment.

"There is something more," said Dr. Lynch. "Long after I had looked for the last time on the countenance of my dear dead sister, and sentence of death had been passed upon her murderess, Raymond Peel's wife lingered in prison —unhanged! Then God tried her for her life, and left her living, with a new-born son, her only offspring. That was the life I pitied, the life of the murderess' child."

Charlotte roused herself as from a stupor, and became suddenly animated.

"Where is the child? What of *him?*" she asked, watching the doctor curiously.

"Raymond Peel refused to see his son. He provided for his maintenance, and the wretched mother commended her baby to the care of her sister, a thoroughly worldly woman, and most unsuitable for the charge. The boy's father stipulated that he must never learn the disgrace of his birth and parentage, and I believe to this day Mrs. Donnington-Bain has kept faithful to her promise. It is the fear that his son will seek him out and claim relationship that makes Raymond Peel so imperative on that point."

Charlotte's head sank back, and she clasped her hands in an attitude of prayer. This harrowing intelligence cast a new light upon everything.

"Then, Hugh," she murmured, apparently speaking to herself, "Hugh is my stepson, Raymond's child, his first wife's, unowned, deserted! while Mrs. Donnington-Bain is Raymond's deceased wife's sister."

Involuntarily a sensation of deep relief passed over her.

"Yes. You have much to think out Mrs. Peel, and much to forgive."

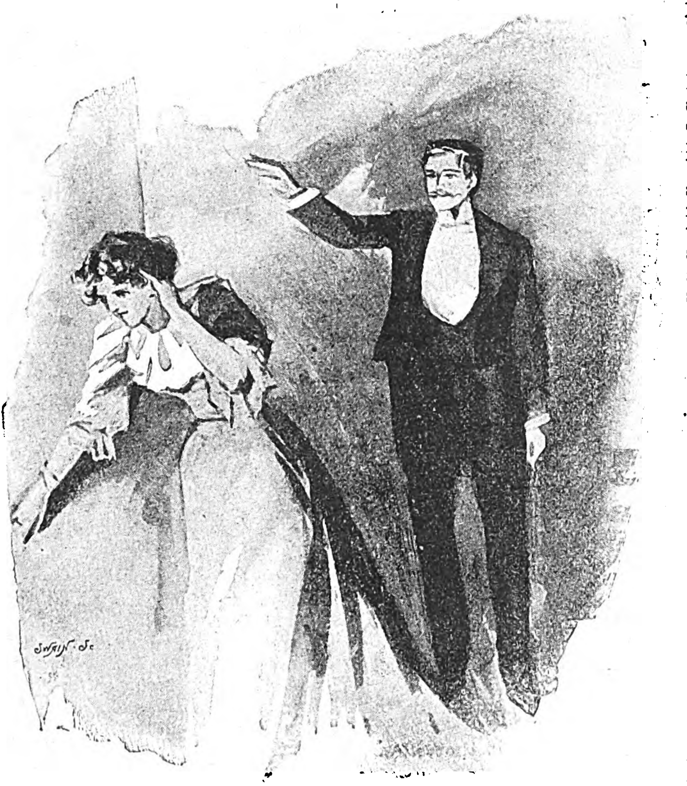
"It is a woman's mission to forgive," she replied, thinking how much easier it was to pardon this offence than the one she had suspected, since death had parted the offenders for twenty years. Besides, had she not sworn to love him under *any* circumstances, even though he warned her his past was evil?

"You can understand now," said Dr. Lynch, "that Mr. Peel and I could never exchange a friendly greeting—that to my dying day I shall hate the man who robbed me of my dearest earthly treasure. May the world reserve for you a better fate, Mrs. Peel, than that of your predecessor."

He seized her little gloved hand, and held it for a moment trembling within his own. Her lips quivered, she tried to speak, but her breath fled.

"Poor Dr. Lynch!" she faltered at last. "You have tasted the bitter reality of life. I was living in a dream—a very happy one!"

"God bless you in your first sorrow," he murmured, a weary sadness in his tone. He had spoken in earnest when he said, "the truth and nothing but the truth." Yet it was not the *whole* truth, for as he unfolded the past, watching the young wife's pale cheeks and dilating eyes, a horrible repulsion arrested him ere he completed the story. How could he wreck her life utterly with the words now trembling on his tongue? She had listened bravely to his tale, though her lips twitched with strong emotion. Dr. Lynch drew his hand across his brow, and a sudden dread seized her as she watched his expression.



"Once and for all, Charlotte, let the subject drop!"

"There is nothing more?" she gasped.

"I have finished," he replied. "Heaven knows enough has been said!"

A moment later he had alighted, and Charlotte was driving towards her home.

That evening she decided to broach the subject of Hugh Derringer's illness to her husband. It would be a difficult task thrusting her newly-acquired knowledge upon Raymond, and half an hour passed in comparative silence before she could bring herself to commence.

"You asked me to-day," she began, fixing her eyes on the rings of smoke from his cigarette, "why I was silent and constrained. You observed a change in me."

Raymond held out his hand to her.

"Truthfully speaking, I thought you were a little cross," he replied with a smile.

"Oh! no; only worried and anxious. Hugh Derringer is very ill."

"What have you to do with him?" he asked sharply. "Millions are suffering in the world without exciting our compassion. Their wants are nothing to us."

"But the wants of a son," she ventured timidly.

"Charlotte, what do you mean?"

"That I know all you would have hidden from me"—speaking very tenderly—"I am willing to forget the sad past, dear, utterly and entirely; only let us think what is right for the future."

"How much do you know?" he said, coldly, avoiding her eyes.

"The closing chapter of your first marriage. I learnt it from Dr. Lynch. You have neglected a life for which you are responsible, for Hugh Derringer is nevertheless your son, though you have forsaken him."

Charlotte's courage was stimulated by her husband's injustice, and she continued without wavering:

"There may be little time in which to retrieve the wrong. Your son is dying slowly but surely, in a wretched lodging, while we fatten on our dainties. It is monstrous that such things should be! You are visiting your own sin and the mother's on an utterly innocent and defenceless being."

"I make him a very good allowance," muttered Raymond, when he had sufficiently recovered from his astonishment to speak.

"Half of which is probably spent on Mrs. Donnington-Bain's back, since she is a recklessly extravagant woman—minus a conscience. The boy is consumptive, yet she leaves him to toil for his daily bread in the suffocating atmosphere of London. As soon as he will move I shall have him here."

"You would bring him *here*—under my very roof?" exclaimed her husband, confronting her with flashing eyes.

"What roof more suitable?" she asked. "Is he not your own flesh and blood?"

"But he must never know it," declared Raymond, excitedly. "I could bear anything but that!"

"Hugh, though young, is already a man of the world," she replied; "and cannot for ever be kept in ignorance. I *must* acquaint him with the mystery of his birth, though the motive of his mother's crime shall never pass my lips."

"Charlotte," he said, firmly, "the boy shall *not* come here. I couldn't stand it! Your promise was easily forgotten when put to the test, and you have broken faith with me by looking into the past."

She knitted her brows, and her face changed.

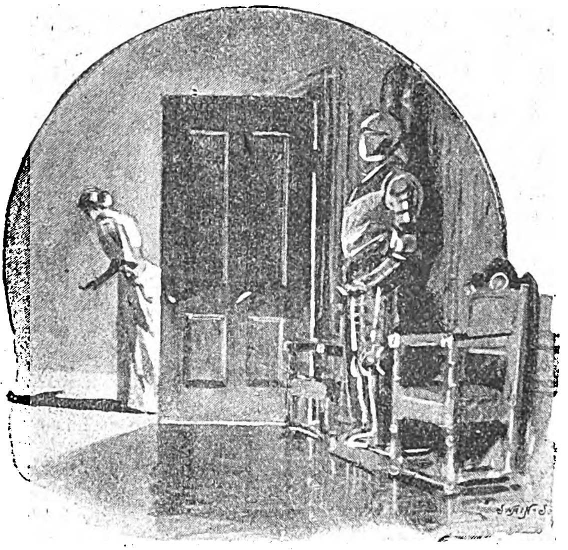
"The knowledge came to me," she said; "and I accepted it in a forgiving spirit, believing I might influence you to redeem the wrong. I thought you were man enough to face your faults, and take back your son. Instead, I find you imbued with a selfish desire to hide your neglected child from the world, clinging still to outward esteem, at the loss of self-respect. Raymond, I cannot banish this cloud and remain with you unless you consent to own him. That alone is my condition."

Charlotte spoke hotly, yet she looked so helpless, so beseeching, that he did not believe her threat.

Unconquerable anger took possession of him, as he struck the table heavily with his fist.

"Once and for all, Charlotte, let the subject drop!"

She did not reply, but, with a crushed look of disappointment left the room, closing the door very softly.



With a crushed look of disappointment left the room.

For many hours Raymond sat gloomily contemplating this fresh turn of events, and it was late into the night before he became alarmed at Charlotte's non-appearance.

"She could not have spoken in earnest," he thought, rising as from a stupor.

At first he went from room to room, momentarily expecting to meet his wife, till suddenly a terrible dread seized him, and calling her loudly by name, Raymond hurried hither and thither in a frenzy of despair. When he discovered she was no longer in the house, the truth of her words dawned on him. He had lost her love. He had lost a wife.

All that night he waited, sleepless and distracted, the victim of an overpowering remorse; but Charlotte did not return. Was this to be the disastrous consequence of his decision? If so, his punishment was harder than he could bear.

Early on the following day, his face worn and furrowed by anxiety, Raymond called upon Mrs. Donnington-Bain, only to be told she could not see him for three hours, as she did not rise until twelve. Before that time, however, he sent an urgent letter, imploring for an interview.

Augusta received him swathed in a loose silk wrapper, her hair flowing below her waist.

"You cruel man to drag me from my slumbers!" she cried, jestingly.

"Give me Hugh Derringer's address," he said, ignoring her remark. "I think Charlotte may be there, and I want to fetch the boy home. Quick! the address—do you hear?"

"Fetch him home!"

Surely, she thought, Raymond could not intend robbing her of the comfortable allowance she had so long shared with her unsuspecting nephew?

"Well, you *are* a specimen!" she declared, looking him up and down. "Whatever is the matter?"

"I have no time to answer questions, and I want my son's address."

"This is a fresh phase of imbecility, Raymond, which I really cannot humour."

"Augusta, for Heaven's sake drop your bantering! Can't you see I'm in earnest? I mean to make amends."

"Oh! a penitent!" laughed she. "Then why come to me? Do I look like a Father Confessor?"

"Will you or will you not give me his address?"

"No, you old humbug! It is nothing but despicable curiosity. You want to sneak round and *see* the boy unrecognised. Well, it is not my fault if his surroundings are hardly aristocratic. He gets the money right enough."

Augusta spoke unblushingly, with eyes fixed upon his face.

"I don't doubt it, but in the future all will be different. I mean to make a clean breast of it, for Charlotte's sake."

"You can find him yourself," she hissed, sweeping from the room.

Then commenced an active search, after which Raymond finally procured the desired address from Lady Logan, and hastened to the baker's shop in a state of nervous trepidation.

"Is Mr. Derringer at home?" he asked.

"No, sir; he left this morning with a lady. He is not returning."

A terrible look of distress passed over Raymond's face.

"Did you know the lady's name?"

"Yes, sir. He spoke to her as Mrs. Peel."

Raymond's eyes stared before him with a fixed expression of despair.

"Where did they go?" he questioned, anxiously, pausing breathless for her reply.

"I do not know, but they talked of leaving England," said the woman in the baker's shop.

CHAPTER V.

RAYMOND PEEL sickened with fear and doubt, as he staggered from the baker's door, dazed by the astounding news of his wife's flight. At first he could hardly grasp the meaning, and beads of perspiration gleamed on his forehead, while misery numbed his nerves into a half unconscious state.

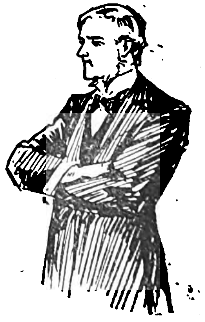
A drunken man reeling down the street lurched against him.

"She is far away on the ocean wave!" he shouted to the tune of a popular music-hall air. Raymond listened, arrested by some horrible fascination, till the words sank into a mumble, and the unsteady figure vanished down the street. He shivered as he glanced with repulsion at the house in which his son had lodged, and hastened on. It was humiliating—horribly humiliating! With dogged obstinacy he determined to seek Augusta once again, convinced she knew more than she cared to own. Prepared not to be admitted, he resorted to stratagem, and gave the name of her manager, which brought Mrs. Donnington-Bain smiling into his presence. Her countenance changed as she caught sight of him, and a hardened expression compressed the lips that a moment since were parted with spontaneous greeting. She shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Why have you returned?" she asked.

"Why?" replied Raymond, with sudden fierceness. "Didn't I tell you I wanted my son? Now I want my wife. They are both missing."

"Lost, stolen, or strayed?" cried Augusta, a cruel laugh escaping her. "You are simply a mass of contradictions, Raymond, neglecting the boy from his cradle, and then howling because he happens to be out when you call."



Dr. Lynch.

The anxiety he had struggled to repress now made itself clearly felt as he paced the room, his fingers nervously interlaced, and his head bent.

"I tell you, Augusta, Charlotte knows all!"

"*All?*" exclaimed Mrs. Donnington-Bain, suddenly.

"Yes. She learnt the details of my wife's death, and the reason for the murder. Lynch divulged it! She besought me to own my son, but I refused. Ah! I know it was cowardly; and that same night she left me. I believe she has gone abroad with Hugh Derringer. If you have heard anything of all this, for the sake of the good that is in you, don't keep it from me!"

"I am not as indifferent as I seem," she replied, with a graceful shake of her well-poised head. "But supposing I told you I am utterly unacquainted with the movements of your erratic young wife—what then?"

"It is impossible the boy could leave England without your knowledge, since he is dependent on you for money; unless, as I begin to imagine, he lives upon his own energies, and the allowance goes elsewhere."

"Since when have you developed these absurd suspicions?" she retorted, a sneer curling her lip.

"Since this morning," answered Raymond, ceasing his quick, even strides, and standing rigidly upon the hearthrug.

"You want rest and sleep," Augusta declared, "for Mrs. Peel's playful little whims have evidently affected your brain. You are over-wrought, my dear Raymond. Take an effervescing mixture to cool you down, and go to bed; things will right themselves in a day or two."

The calmer she grew the more exasperated he became.

"I do not believe I am wronging you," he said. "At any rate, since you are unable to help me, and Hugh Derringer has left England without a word, the money will cease immediately, Augusta, understand that."

A flush rose over her cheek, creeping down the delicate curves of her throat.

"You dare not stop it," she hissed, with a sudden intaking of her breath. "I say you dare not, Raymond Peel! Do you forget you are in my hands, utterly and entirely? You will double the payment if I choose."

A dead cold pallor stole across his face.

"Look here," he said, sharply. "What do you mean?"

"That the world is still in ignorance of your identity. Your past discreditable history is known to Dr. Lynch and myself alone. He will not mention it to slur his dead sister's character. But I am bound by no such tie."

"Have *you* not a dead sister also?"

Augusta's face twitched. Raymond thought it looked almost ugly for a moment.

"Her memory is blackened already by crime. When sentence of death was passed upon her you had not even the nerve to wait until your child was born. After arranging with me for its maintenance you left the country, and hid your grief in the wilds of Africa. Finally you took your passage to England under a new name, and have lived here ever since."

"It seemed like beginning life again," he said.

"Be sure your sin will find you out," quoted Augusta, mockingly. "It is difficult to bury a living child, and harder still to escape from a hidden past. So long as you are in the world, the days that have been will cast a reflection on the days to come. You are a pitiful creature, Raymond, and for the sake of your pretty, wilful Charlotte I do not wish to drag your name through the mire; but I cannot honestly afford to keep silence for nothing. Leaving Hugh Derringer out of the question, that allowance must continue."

"You demand hush-money? I should not have thought a woman of your spirit could have sunk so low."

"Perhaps not. We live and learn. Now, let me recommend you change of air, for this room is unhealthily hot, and doubtless your carriage is waiting."

But Raymond was not to be put off so easily.

"Before I go," he said, "can you swear you know nothing of their movements, that you are not tricking me with lies, and merely feigning ignorance?"

"I would swear anything to be rid of you, *mon ami!*"

"Augusta, you are the most exasperating woman that ever trod this earth."

"Yet, still a woman, and, therefore, naturally inclined to torment mankind, for women were made to give trouble. They live and revel in the fact till life ebbs out of their bodies, and a handful of dust in a mouldering coffin is all that is left of the dear distracting creatures."

She laughed as she spoke, though Raymond's clear-cut, hard-featured face grew dark with hatred.

"Are you at the bottom of this or not?" he muttered, rather speaking his thoughts aloud than questioning.

"You men are so persistent that you end by gaining your way. Once and for all, then, I know——"

"What?" he asked eagerly, as she paused, glancing at him from the corners of her eyes.

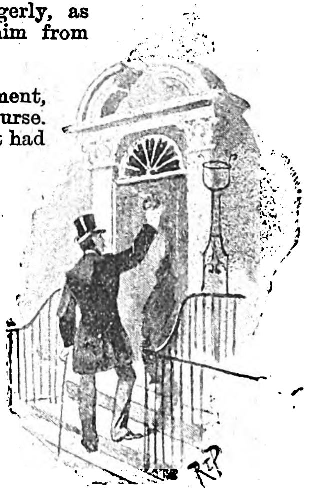
"*Nothing!*"

His hope kindled for a moment, sinking with a muttered curse. The faint fleck of colour that had risen to his cheek faded away, and he moved mechanically to the door.

"May I offer you a glass of liqueur brandy?" cried Mrs. Donnington-Bain, laying her hand on his sleeve. He drew his arm sharply away, while the sternness in his eyes deepened.

"I hardly know whether to laugh or cry!" Augusta continued. "You are half tragic and half grotesque."

"You have always seen humour in tragedy, and tragedy in humour," he replied.


Raymond called upon Mrs. Donnington-Bain.

"Alas! I am compelled to, or I could not live!"

He refused her outstretched hand, and turned silently away.

Raymond Peel looked ten years older as he left the hotel.

That night he mentally re-acted his interview with Augusta, and came to a conclusion. He would refuse to leave himself in her power and be stretched for ever on the rack. Charlotte knew the worst—why not then the whole world? *She* was *his* world—his all in life! What cared he for any other? If his heart must be torn out, the carrion vultures might scream their miserable story at will!

"I was mad," he thought, "to momentarily contemplate bribing Augusta."

So he wrote Mrs. Donnington-Bain a curt letter, and dispatched it that same evening.

A singular smile played round her lips as she scanned its contents.

"He little knows his adversary!" she said, opening her desk and drawing a sheet of paper towards her. "Poor fool! Does he fancy I have only one weapon!"

Then she wrote with firm, unflinching fingers:

DEAR RAYMOND,

It is only fair to warn you before blackening your character, that I have a graver, more terrible secret in the background, which I think you would give your whole fortune to conceal. I shall not act hastily, as I wish you to have time to recover your senses, and meet my terms. I can faithfully assure you that this is no brag, and believe me I hold you in the hollow of my hand.

Your friend—or enemy?

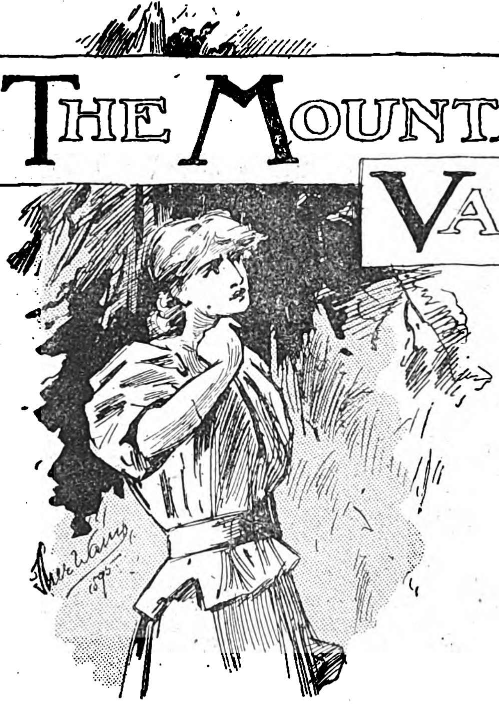
AUGUSTA DONNINGTON-BAIN.

"Does the woman think me crazy?" exclaimed Raymond, flinging the letter in the fire.

So Mrs. Donnington-Bain waited fruitlessly for the result of her bomb-shell.

(To be continued.)

THE MOUNTAIN VALKYRIE



WHERE the rough mountain road led up from the valley beneath it turned abruptly into a narrow gorge, and there, in the dusk of the falling evening, Kendal Trance came upon a strange scene. At first he scarcely distinguished the two figures and the respective attitudes they held. He saw an arm raised, saw it descend with most astonishing vigour, then, urging on his horse, he was at the side of the combatants, and faced the slim youth and the tall, massive girl, blonde and muscular as a Norse war goddess, whose round arm, firm as marble in the twilight (her coarse homespun sleeve was turned up from the elbow), had hurled itself against the youth's head.

"For shame!" cried Kendal Trance, who knew the youth, a pitiful fellow enough; "what's the meaning of this?"

But it was the girl who replied, standing there with heaving chest and a frown dark as midnight upon her straight brows.

"He kin let me be after this," she remarked, scowling towards the victim of her own magnificent strength. "I cuffed him till he'll recognise it when he sees me next!"

"Did you insult this girl?" came quickly from Kendal. The girl looked up at him in the dusk. His face had a pallor under the brim of his slouch hat.

"I kin help myself if he did!" she suddenly spoke, the defiance of her mood turning largely against this would-be defender. "I don't want none o' your jawin'." And she was gone with a bound, in the thicket of the hillside.

"Aw! she be a fury," muttered the chastised delinquent, after her. "That's what Se'cashy be!—What I done anyways? I grabbed her ez she was a-walkin' 'long, jest fur a kiss. She's owin' it ter me, fer she knows she's set me crazy with those eyes o' hern; an' I done axed for it; and when she turned about on me I sees sparks, and I grabbed her, and she flung out! Aw, she be a fury!"

"Serves you right. Leave her alone after this," brusquely said Kendal, spurring his horse. The sickle of the moon was coming up above the mountains. The lonely road was full of strange murmurings from the woods. Kendal Trance set his lips together. This had been one of the days when the past (not so long passed) had surged upon him till he sickened, and the details of the present life had become impossible. The revolted bitterness of his mood was distinct upon him as an evil taste in the mouth.

Two days later it was Sunday. Kendal Trance talked to the people then—they called it "preachin'"—even as he tried to teach them during the week in the school-house. They straggled in—women with babies in their arms, men in muddy top-boots, carrying their guns. The doors were open, and the autumn sunshine made a pale glare without. In the blue calm of the Indian summer the red and yellow trees stood motionless. Kendal began to speak and forgot his hearers. He spoke passionately, carried on by the long pent-up stress of contending emotions within him, losing sight of his initial text, of the concrete and practical notions for every-day application, which he generally sought to instil into the dull minds of these, his ignorant fellow creatures.

While he stopped he saw the slow wonderment dawning in the eyes of his hearers as they filed out. They had understood nothing, but that impassioned poetry of speech had stirred some dormant chord within them. As he reached the door himself, he saw a tall girl in blue homespun leaning against the outside wall. She had heavy masses of blonde hair wound above a massive throat. He recognised her. It was the girl called in the mountains "Se'cashy"—the parentless girl who lived alone in the cabin in the woods, and whom he had met in the road two nights before—the girl Circassia. He nodded to her absently.

That night, as he sat under the lamp, not reading, there was a sharp tap at the door, and, before he could reply, the door was flung open, and Circassia entered. She stood an instant irresolute, her scowling glance absorbing the details of the room, its books, its papers. Then she burst forth, turning those strange blue eyes upon him:

"I want 'er learn some book stuff!" She tossed her thumb towards the books on the shelves. "I ain't never keered for book-learnin', but I want it now. Folks sez you teach ter the schule. I want 'er come," she ended, roughly.

"Very well. What makes you wish to learn now?"

"I heer you this mornin'; that's the reason why!" she said, defiantly. "I ain't ketched on ter what yer sed; but I want ter; that's why I come. Yer been't like other men 'round yere. I hates men. But I kin abide ter listen ter you."

All this she spoke with her eyes on his, and her hand still on the knob of the door. Through all her uncouth savagery, Kendal's æsthetic instinct (that cultivation of the eye which was second nature to him) perceived, as it were unconsciously, her strange beauty. The words of her pitiful, worsted admirer on the roadside two nights before, "she's set me crazy with those eyes o' hern," flashed back upon him. They were remarkable eyes. Blue-green in the lamp-light, with something inviolately virginal in the core of their bold brilliancy. And, even as he thought it she was gone, with a clang of the door.

And thus, with a new pupil in the mountain settlement, 3,000 feet above sea level, the winter began for the man who, at thirty, blasted in the world which had hitherto known him by an unjust suspicion, had left in revolted disgust his career and the glittering hopes of the future, and buried himself in these wilds, far from civilisation, there to lead (with such little good as he could do in passing to the ignorant humanity around him) the life of an embittered recluse.

* * * * *

The snow lingered, and the thaws were long in coming that year. A stray messenger from the nearest post-office made his way, but with difficulty, to the settlement. Thus a letter, addressed to Kendal Trance, reached its destination a week later than it should have done.

Written by a cousin, a woman (and a young woman), it began with a sort of cry of despair at the recent conditions of his life, and then eagerly broke to him the glad news. "The good news that has made us all live again, dear Kendal, and that will bring you back to us in honour, back to the place which is waiting for you, and in which we all feel that you will do great things yet!"

A full confession had finally been made by the man who, after embezzling funds belonging to a high civic charge to which he was committed, had at first cunningly contrived to throw the appearance of guilt on the younger man associated with him—on his partner in business, Kendal Trance.

Kendal Trance's reputation was now washed whiter than ever, and his fellow citizens in the rigid far Eastern town had conferred together to request his return from voluntary exile, and to receive him, when he should come, with such ovations as the place had never known. "And Lawrence and I are going to fetch you ourselves, Kendal." Thus the letter concluded. "We shall find you out in your mountain hermitage, and force you to leave it and to come back to your rightful life, with us!"

The letter reached Kendal, and was opened by him in the little school-house by the wayside. The scholars had left, the morning lesson completed; but, as he slowly raised his head, crushing the letter in his hand, he saw that he was not alone. Circassia lingered behind the others near the door. The door was open, and he could see the road outside, heavy with the spring rains and thaws. And then two figures came within his range of vision—a man in a light top-coat, a pretty woman in travelling dress, and with such gloves and boots as he had not seen for two years.

"Kendal!"

It was the writer of the letter, with her brother. She was still young; she was emotional; she had always, half-unconsciously to herself, held a place in her heart for this particular cousin, which he could at any time have taken possession of, and thus doing, have taken possession of the whole. The tears rushed to her eyes now, and she clung prettily to his shoulder a little, as he held her hand. Her brother meantime wrung Kendal's disengaged fingers in a manly grasp, and said, simply:

"Well, it's all right, old man. I needn't tell you how glad we are!"

A moment later the three were walking slowly towards the settlement. But Circassia stood by the school-door still, and watched the retreating figures.

* * * * *

The last night!

The books (Kendal's sole, real companions for two years) were packed, the boxes stood ready. The lamplight fell on the little dismantled room of the one boarded cottage of the settlement which he had made his home. He was leaving it to-morrow. He was going back to his "rightful place in life." With a sense of perfect satisfaction in that justice had been done him at last? No. He threw open the window, and leant out. The night was odorous and filled with mysterious stirrings. And the restlessness of nature was in the man's blood, likewise; a deep bitterness for the past injustice, which no reparation could now wipe away, mingled with some other feeling, of which he did not choose to analyse the constituents.

Behind him the lamplight flared up in a sudden gust of wind. The door had opened, and, as he turned, he faced Circassia.

"If it's true—true you're goin'"—her eyes swept about the room, with its glittering signs of preparation—"I got ter know it—now!"

He came slowly towards her without replying.

"They was a saying' it all over the settlement that you was—was a-goin'." Her hand went up to the neck of the homespun gown as if the light structure oppressed her, and her eyes were black in the lamplight. "And when I see her—her—that lady—yisterday—I 'lowed she'd take you with her!"

He saw her breath come fast, and then the passion within her broke loose.

"I hates her—I hates her! I hates the likes o' her, and the likes o' the man that's with her, her brother, they says! I hates 'em, and the big town you're agoin' to! I hates 'em all—all; because—because I loves you!"

Magnificently she made her confession, as the savage she was, unabashed and unafraid, with a wild sort of dignity in the imperious poise of her beautiful blonde head. She threw her love in his teeth, not as a suppliant, but as one who confers a royal favour.

"I loves you!" she repeated.

"And I—Circassia—my wild mountain bird, my beautiful savage. Circassia, my girl, I, too, love you!" he said, then, at last, with a long breath.

* * * * *

"Not going with us?" repeated Kendal Trance's pretty cousin, sitting in her travelling dress the following morning in the "hotel" of the village in the valley, five miles below the settlement.

"Not going?" she murmured, turning white; and then her brother, who, as agreed upon, had just driven up to the settlement to meet Kendal, and to bear him away, told his remarkable tale. Kendal, since the night before, had changed his mind. He would not return to civilisation now, not till he brought with him the mountain girl who, put into a boarding-school, was for two or three years to be trained to be his wife.

"His wife!"

Long the brother and sister talked, the latter trembling a little, with a great bitterness in her soul.

"But this is suicide!" she cried at length. "What can a man like Kendal do with such a girl—for you say you saw her this morning? He is mad!"

"Perhaps," said her brother, meditatively, and then, with a remembrance vivid before him of Circassia as he had seen her, for the first and last time—Circassia, beautiful and haughty as a Valkyrie—as the wild dream of a poet—he added: "I don't know, though—I don't know."

W. H.

A MAN OF MANY WIVES

THERE were three hundred and sixty-five of them! One for every day in the year.

Nevertheless Barak was not a sultan; he was a *hageb*—that is, upper chamberlain—at the court of the Sultan Mohammed. He had come to the country as ambassador of the great Mongolian kingdom, and the widow of the late Sultan, yet young and pretty, had given him the management of her household, her son, Mohammed, being still a child.

Barak's administration was good. The army owed to him, among other reforms, the raising of the soldiers' pay from three to four aspers (pennies).

One day the Grand Vizier, Darfur Ali, visited the upright Hageb, and, while the two drank coffee, the guest began:

"Truly Barak Hageb, it is a folly unworthy of you to keep so many wives. If it was with us as the Franks the custom to give wives, you might then be as rich as King Sapor; but here you must not only buy your wife, but must pay cash for her. Now, you have squandered a great deal of gold for this purpose, and when your money is spent, what have you? For the cost of one wife you could keep a hundred soldiers."

Barak stroked his beard. "One should pick as many flowers as he can from the world's garden," he returned.

"True enough, you have blonde and brunette, white and black, blue-eyed and grey-eyed women, yellow Chinese and brown Malay—yes, and even those women that colour their hair red and their teeth black. Now, I think that one of each sort should be enough. By Allah! you have so many that you cannot remember either their names or their special good qualities."

"Don't you believe it," said Hageb. "I will show you. First, then, there is Jedibah, who can prophesy—we need her to tell the fate of the nation; then Hafitem, the medium, who calls up the spirits of the dead; Nourmahal, who understands the languages of the birds better than I do yours; Alpaide tells stories that would put a sultan to sleep; Mahadevi and Assainte are famous for a *pas de deux*. The great thing about Mangora is that she makes a sultan's bread that is exquisite. Sandabad concocts a wonderful sherbet, after which you wash your beard with regret. Zul——"

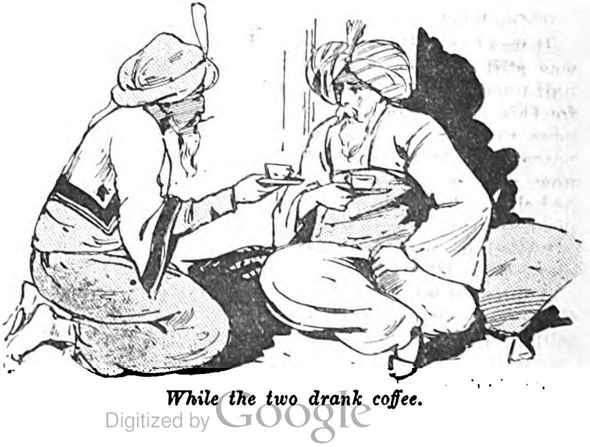
"I have heard enough, you need every one of them—each has evidently her famous side. Take care, lest some day you discover an infamous one."

Whether the Grand Vizier was right or not the following story will show.

The Sultan of Kermau, Sidi Achmed, hearing Mohammed's people were discontented, decided to liberate them from their oppression. To alleviate the sufferings of his neighbours has always been a labour of love to Oriental rulers.

Sidi Achmed commanded an immense army. Some Persian historians say he had ten thousand soldiers; others insisted that he had one hundred thousand; the truth probably lay somewhere between the two. Certain it is that he had three hundred cavalrymen.

Before declaring war he raised the pay of the troops



While the two drank coffee.

from four to five aspers. This naturally caused universal enthusiasm.

Sidi Achmed was at the head of the army, himself and his horse loaded with precious stones. The sight of them caused a glow of righteous pride in every barefooted warrior who turned out. The Sultan took with him the most costly delicacies, and the thought that the Sultan fared sumptuously went far to cheer the hungry soldiers.

Mohammed also had an enormous standing army. The Grand Vizier Darfur Ali was appointed commander.

The night before the first battle, one of Barak's wives, the Jedibah of whom we have already heard, prophesied that the neighbouring kingdom would be destroyed; and Roxana, who also dabbled in fortune-telling, predicted that on the next day Sidi Achmed would die.

These predictions were made public in the principal city, and there was in consequence universal enthusiasm.

Barak himself was firmly convinced that both would be fulfilled, and he and his entire following of women occupied, the next day, a hill above the battle-field, in order to enjoy from that coign of vantage the amusing spectacle of the downfall of the enemy.

The battle began early in the morning, but it did not last long. In describing it the historians again differ widely. The Persian chronicle says the army of Mohammed lost forty-five thousand men, while the enemy lost but three. Another writer states that the army of Mohammed did not lose a man, while the opponent lost thirty-three thousand. Perhaps in this case, also, the real truth lies half-way between the two statements. All agree that the army of Mohammed speedily gave leg-bail, and proved that no one could catch them.

"By the beard of the Prophet!" cried Barak Hageb, seeing the flight of his soldiery, "I almost think Jedibah's prophecy is not going to be fulfilled. On the contrary, our own country appears to be lost."

"Have patience," murmured the prophetess, consolingly; "the sun has not yet sunk into the sea."

The observation being just, Barak philosophised no more, but spurred his horse, and, with his spouses, sought safety in flight.

Sidi Achmed had heard of Barak's wealth and of his wives, and so soon as he was informed of the flight he hastened in pursuit. Until late in the afternoon two dust-clouds might be seen, one chasing the other; the one beaten up by Barak Hageb and his wives, the other by the troopers of Sidi Achmed.

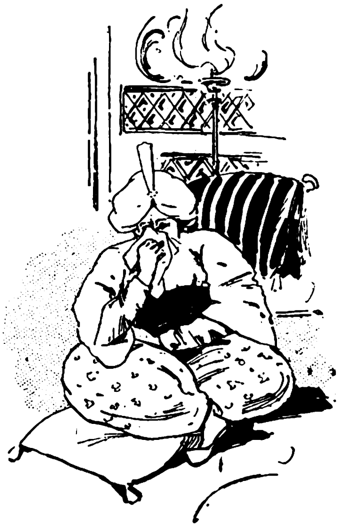
"By the holy apron of the Prophet's wife," growled Barak, "Roxana's prognostication likewise fails to be fulfilled. I shall be the dead man to-day, and not Sidi Achmed."

"The stars are not yet visible," replied the white Roxana. "There near yonder pond we will take rest. You may take your evening bath and pray; let the rest be our care."

In the meantime the women were not idle. When Barak returned from his evening devotions he found instead of his pious family of wives, an army of bearded troopers. Great at first was his fright, for the warriors were of fearful aspect.

The women had cut off the manes and tails of their horses, and had made themselves false beards. From a neighbouring grove they had cut bamboo canes, to the ends of which they attached their tiny daggers, making thereby elegant lances.

Yarko the Tartar, and Zibella the Indian, commanded the gentle cavalry. The troopers were divided into three divisions.



Barak Hageb was touched.

Sidi Achmed came on in wild haste; as soon, however, as he saw these warriors, whose long beards swept down to their stirrups, his heart failed him. At once a portly hero rode up to him, calling him to come forth to single combat.

This was Zibella, so expert with the knife that she could split a hair at twelve paces. The very first throw of her lance killed Sidi Achmed.

Under the guidance of the Tartar Yarko, the other Amazons now pressed upon the enemy. The troopers of Sidi Achmed were but lukewarm. Five pennies is a nice sum, but it hardly pays for a hole in one's hide. Each of these fellows, therefore, took his shield upon his back, and fled as fast as his feet could carry him.

The head of the Sultan was struck from his body, and stuck on the point of a lance. With this token of triumph, the party pressed on to Kermau. The city gates were cheerfully opened, for now everybody knew that Sidi Achmed was a tryant; while Barak Hageb was praised as the liberator of the nation, and was finally asked to be its Sultan.

Barak Hageb assembled his wives and said to them: "Glorious women, I thank you for my life. Yes, I have more to thank you for: my fame and my kingdom. Name, then, the reward you desire; I swear by Allah to grant it."

Then came forward Zibella, and spoke:

"O, great Sultan, we do, indeed, deserve a reward, for we have fought for you like men. We ask nothing small, therefore; we ask for freedom, and our desire is that all the women in your kingdom shall be as free as men."

Barak Hageb was touched; very much touched; he shed tears. Then he said:

"You ask for something unheard of—something that has never yet been. Yet it must be, for I have sworn. In Kermau, from this time forth, woman is as free as man, and the wives of Barek Hageb may proclaim that they have gained this freedom by their own efforts."

And so the new sultan won the hearts of his people, and even in the neighbouring realms his fame increased.

All the sultans round claimed his friendship and solicited his kinship.

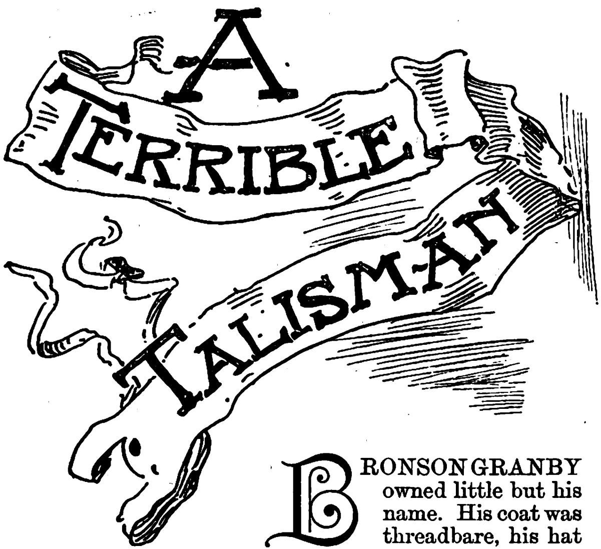
The makers of marriages beseiged his house; even the Sultan Mohammed, at whose court Barak had once been ambassador, offered him sisters and cousins.

To him Barak replied: "I choose neither your sisters nor yet your cousins, for I want not frivolity, but rather wisdom. If you really desire to be kinsman of mine, give me for wife—your mother."

And so it happened.

After having had three hundred and sixty-five wives, he contented himself with one, and found it enough.

E. Duval.



A TERRIBLE TALISMAN

Bronson Granby owned little but his name. His coat was threadbare, his hat could scarcely hold its own; those portions of his scanty linen visible at wrists and throat were so frayed and torn that the clipping treatment bade fair to prove annihilation, and of his boots so little individuality remained one might well scoff at the popular fallacy, that to those who wore shoes it was as if the whole earth was covered with leather. In truth, despite their outward respectability, only the shadows of soles intervened between his weary feet and the rough road he travelled; the leather was a thing of the past.

Tall and gaunt was Bronson Granby; he held himself painfully erect, as if fearful that the slightest relaxation would prove his undoing. His grey hair, worn a trifle long, was brushed back from his broad forehead, and to a physiognomist the strongly marked face, with its deep-set piercing eyes, was one never to be forgotten.

Of course he had a history—everyone has for the matter of that—but Bronson Granby had never quite finished his first chapter. He had, from his precocious childhood, a most inventive mind, which only a solid education and strict discipline could transform into practical usefulness. This, however, was not his portion, and the great schemes by which, as he fondly imagined, the thinking world would be swayed, proved as delusive as Fortune herself, who smiled upon him from afar, but vanished as he drew near.

"But a few hundreds in my hand," he would say, with an expressive motion of the long, thin, nervous member, "and I might make a million—more or less."

Alas! it was always less, for the hundreds had been squandered, and at fifty—worn, emaciated, an old man in the very prime of life—he still waited, with the same impatience of thirty years ago, the granting of his first patent. He had either been too far ahead of the times, or too late in filing his application; or, what is still more probable, his mechanical appliances never fairly illustrated his broad conceptions. But the fact remained, and this man, who was, as it were, the fountain-head of so many brilliant possibilities that died at their birth, hovered about the sacred precincts of the Patent Office, striving in vain for that spell, the "open sesame," without which he could never enter the wonder-world of fame.

He was well known, and regarded by those who watched him come and go with unfailing regularity as somewhat of a crank. But, still undaunted by repeated failure, he lingered in London year after year, held there, doubtless, by some vague, dim hope of better things. He managed somehow to pick up a scanty living, crumbs dropped by busy officials, a scrap of writing, an odd job here and there; anything to turn an honest penny was not beneath Bronson Granby. And in the meantime, there was *the invention*, the culmination of all his best endeavours and high aims. There it was, tested and approved by competent judges, awaiting recognition!

One evening at dusk, when March was at its windiest, the Inventor, wrapped in an old cloak, that, like himself, had seen better days, issued forth to brave the elements. It was raining a fine unpleasant drizzle, which the blast caught up and turned into sleet, that came driving against the venturesome wayfarer; but though Bronson Granby's slight figure swayed like a reed in the hurricane which met him at every crossing, he struggled on with unabated energy, until finally he stood before a massive looking dwelling, situated a little beyond the fashionable limits of the city, yet distinguished by a certain air of dignity and repose, as if it had descended from father to son for many generations. He steadied himself for a moment against an iron railing which inclosed the mansion; then he mounted the broad steps and rang the bell.

Yes, Mr. Curtis was at home, and had ordered that the gentleman be shown to the library at once. The stately footman eyed "the gentleman" doubtfully, but Granby's manner repelled impertinent curiosity, so he led the way in silence, and opened the library door with that gentle flourish peculiar to his calling.

In the subdued light shed by the soft glow of a lamp, the Inventor saw a gentleman seated at a large table, busily engaged in writing. He looked up as Granby entered, and their eyes met in cold recognition.

"You sent for me," said Granby, in a low voice.

"I did," replied the other composedly, "though I hardly expected so speedy a compliance with my request. It is long since we met, twenty-five years at the very least. You are changed, Bronson."

"Yes; time has dealt more gently with you." Bronson spoke with repressed bitterness as he glanced at the unlined face with its clear-cut features.

"You forget this," and Curtis smiled as he passed his hand lightly over his silvery hair. The graceful gesture irritated his visitor, who moved impatiently.

"You must be tired," said Gordon Curtis, "pray take that easy chair. I trust you have not come on foot this awful night?"

"It was scarcely dark when I left the place I call home," answered Granby, sinking with real exhaustion into the proffered chair. "The distance is great, but I walk in all seasons and in all weather."

"Shall I ring for wine?" His voice expressed only the coldest courtesy.

"Thank you—no," said Bronson Granby hastily. "You sent for me?" he reiterated. "In what way can I serve you?"

"Serve me!" Curtis allowed the full inflection of sarcasm to dwell in the echo. "*I* rather thought to serve *you*."

"It is the same thing," retorted the other.

"I have heard of your latest invention," pursued Curtis imperturbably. "and being, in my poor way, ranked among men of science, I thought my opinion might be of value to you." He paused for some acknowledgment, but none came. "Have you the instrument with you?" he questioned.

"Your note expressed a desire to see it," said the Inventor, in his direct way. "I have it with me in consequence."

He drew from beneath his cloak a box of medium size and placed it on the table.

"And all your life, your energy, your privation, and your poverty are compressed in those dimensions," observed the host, with a shade of contempt upon his handsome face.

"Say, rather, my ambition, Gordon Curtis, which rises above such sordid considerations."

"True; but I doubt if your ambition has accomplished the ascendency you boast of. I mean no taunt, Bronson. I am only moralising on the different roads we travel. I fancy I have been more prudent than you, as the world takes it. I am a philosopher in my way, dealing with life's most complex problems, on paper. I invent, too, in a manner. I fashion theories with my pen, and they have brought me golden harvests. I cannot always practice what I preach—what matter! I do not set myself upon a pedestal. I merely expound natural and moral laws to the public as I would interpret them to myself if I had time to live again. Doubtless, you have read my article on 'High and Low Pressure?' No! I will give you a copy. And now I will examine your invention, if you will kindly show it to me."

Granby winced under the patronising tone, but without a word he proceeded to expose his treasure to the philosopher's critical gaze.

There was little to be seen. A copper sphere about the size of a toy balloon was prolonged at either pole into a hollow tube a yard long and half an inch in diameter. To one end was attached a metal top, which opened and shut according to the regulations of an ingenious contrivance at the other extremity; a diminutive engine worked by a small electric battery.

The whole apparatus occupied but an insignificant space on the table, yet it was perfect in every detail, and Curtis, as he sat coolly watching both the Inventor and invention, acknowledged this, even while he wondered how those nervous, trembling fingers could be trained to such nicety and precision. He was still more surprised to see Bronson Granby suddenly throw off his gloom and begin to speak with eager enthusiasm.

"The plan is very simple. The object, as you know, is to temper the atmosphere, for which purpose let us suppose that we need the instrument to reduce the temperature in an over-heated room. Well, then our first care is to indicate upon the meter you see here the number of degrees you wish. Fifteen below freezing is the limit of my experiments, though I believe it could stand a much stronger test, and also, by reversing the action of the engine, which requires the opening of another valve, a room of low temperature could be heated to an indefinite number of degrees. Of course, my delineation is rough. Materials of the proper sort are expensive, and I have been forced to construct my engine of inferior metal and in the face of a thousand drawbacks."

"You have done fairly well, I think." The Philosopher spoke in a ruminative way, with his eyes fixed upon the instrument and his brows drawn together in deep thought. "Yet I firmly believe, if you would follow my suggestion, your invention would be more than useful. It would be invaluable. I am, as I said before, a man of theories. I can explain the process of improvement in your design, though the mechanical appliance of the principle is far beyond me. For this reason I sent for you. I know that your pride, or rather, resentment, which has estranged us for a quarter of a century, could be broken only through an appeal to your dearest ambition. I am thus frank with you because, in seeking your aid in the project I have in view, I want to be sure that something more than pecuniary interest binds us."

Curtis looked straight at his visitor, but despite his seeming unreserve, Granby felt that something was hidden, and he resented the calm dissecting glance of those cold grey eyes.

"I cannot quite fathom your motive," he said, with real dignity in voice and manner, "nor what you wish of me; but understand once for all, I will be led into nothing blindfolded. I can justly measure your influence over me, yet I warn you not to go too far. It has been my destiny to play the puppet in more than one of your schemes. But remember, you may bend my spirit to your will, you cannot break it; there is a point at which it rebounds."

"My dear Bronson," observed Curtis, with just that faint shade of sarcasm he could so well assume, "does it not occur to you that you are raising a tempest in a teapot? But you were always impetuous, and I see your solitary life has not curbed the natural impatience of your disposition. You should have married, as I did."

Again Granby shrank beneath the covert taunt his words conveyed. "I am not one to break any woman's heart. I loved only once and faithfully."

Whatever sting may have lurked in his retort, the Philosopher might have been incased in glass for all the impression that it seemed to make. A strange gleam flashed in his eyes, but it was gone directly, and Curtis, leaning back in his easy-chair, evinced not the slightest trace of emotion.

"There!" he exclaimed soothingly, as if humouring a wayward child. "I have roused unpleasant associations; forgive me, and now let us be strictly practical. I have heard your invention favourably discussed by men of science. I approve of it highly. As you say, it is crude, but possessed of capabilities far above what has hitherto been within the range of human power—further than even you have conceived. Your design performs a wonderful task in thus administering to Nature, holding her pulse, keeping an accurate index of her respiration, but why do you stop here? why pause half-way when you might transcend the higher flight of true philanthropy? You have probed to Nature's heart. Have you ever considered how much more accessible are Nature's children—plants, animals, and human beings—and how you might regulate their inward temperature through a diminished reproduction of your instrument?"

Granby had listened attentively. His flushed and animated countenance looked positively handsome as this vision of fame and glory was subtly spread before him. New worlds to conquer still cried out to him, despite the record of lost battles.

"I see," he cried eagerly. "You wish me to try my experiment in your province—mankind. How and for what reason I am as yet ignorant. I cannot work in the dark."

"Nor do I wish it. You interpret my object correctly. I have spent much time in studying the complex passions that sway my kind, and have come to the conclusion that if the animal force within us—heat, you might call it, or cold, as the case may be—were tempered by intellectual force from without, fine and delicate, yet powerful enough to penetrate the human fabric, and work its way to the recesses of the mind and soul, the most astounding results would be produced."

Granby followed every word with kindling enthusiasm. The man was completely submerged in the inventor, whose active brain had already fashioned the outlines of a noble work, and as Curtis stopped to note the effect of his plausible argument, he was startled at the energy and vivacity which swept away a dozen years from the stooping shoulders.

"Only give me time," he cried, "and I may yet be famous."

"And rich," added the Philosopher.

"Gordon Curtis, am I so despicable as to think of money at this crisis?"

"Yet it is useful," said Curtis musingly; "in its base way, of course. I have found it so." He glanced at his luxurious surroundings, and leisurely produced his cheque-book from a drawer in the table. "How much will you need for the furtherance of this scheme, Bronson?"

"I want no aid from you," said Granby irritably, though his hungry eyes followed his host's every movement.

"Nonsense!" answered the other, dipping his pen in the ink. "You cannot work with air, and I have my own reasons for desiring the success of your invention. I wish to use it—to prove its worth—to give it a place in scientific history, and you the fame you sigh for, and the wealth you so despise. What will cover your needs?"

"Are you trying to bribe me by a pen-stroke?"

"No, only through your ambition. That is vulnerable, Bronson. I hold you above all meaner motive."

"You but do me justice," said the Inventor, with a touch of bitterness. "Would to Heaven I could resist you; but you know your power."

Curtis filled out the form and pushed it across the table.

"Understand," he said, slowly, "I am not buying you either body or soul. I am earnest in my desire to add another gem to science's store, another item to my psychological experience. You are the only being who can assist me, and you must do so untrammelled by any feeling of obligation. I have your address, and will drop in upon you as your work progresses, and now," he added, touching a bell, "we will say good-night. You are tired, ride home, spare yourself physically, for your mental powers must not be overtaxed. Tomkins, show the gentleman out."

In a dazed unsteady fashion, Bronson Granby followed his guide; the vista so suddenly opened to him was vast and overwhelming. Absorbed in contemplation, he took little heed of the elegance and luxury which characterised every nook and corner of the fine old mansion; but as he passed the drawing-room, the sound of voices arrested his attention. The door was open, and in the brilliant glow of many lights, so different from the shaded seclusion of the library, the two occupants were plainly to be seen—a man and a woman, both young and handsome, and—from their low and earnest conversation, the murmur of which reached Granby as he paused half-unconsciously on the threshold—both in love. The girl was beautiful, but the Inventor's eyes only rested on her lightly for an instant, and then were riveted on the face of him who sat beside her. He grew pale as he looked, and leant against the door, as if its support were necessary. The butler roused him by a touch on his arm.

"Are you ready, sir; shall I help you with your cloak?"

"Ready? Yes. Thank you, I need no help."

With a sigh he straightened himself to his full height, drew his old cloak closely round him, grasped his treasure firmly, and the next moment found him an alien from the warmth and light, as he had ever been, buffeting with the rude elements on his way towards a tram whose bells jingled in the distance.

* * * * *

It was some days before Bronson Granby could sufficiently calm his excited fancy for the earnest work he had in view. He felt that the effort he was about to make would overtop the highest pinnacle of human conception, that it would tax all his reserve force, both mental and physical, and before he bent himself to his labour, here solved, let Fortune serve him how she would, that his crowning invention should be his last. His feeble frame, lacking the vitality of youth, would be unable to endure much longer such continual nervous pressure. Should success come to him at this late day, the remainder of his life would be passed in peaceful tranquility; if failure were again his portion, he had a presentiment that the tense cords of his being would snap asunder, and the rest he craved would be his for ever.

With these thoughts, the Inventor applied himself heart and soul to a thorough investigation of the subject with which he had to deal—the tempering of human passions by the subtle mechanism of human skill; the regulation of the blood as it surges through the veins, affecting both head and heart. The heating or cooling of the emotions, that was to be his aim, and what force so powerful as electricity to accomplish his purpose? His enthusiasm once kindled, he gave no thought to Curtis's motive in thus stimulating his ambition; he lived only in the great work, and he cared little what happened beyond his closed door so long as he was left in peace.

It was not until the Philosopher himself knocked at the forbidden portal that Granby became sufficiently alive to outside influences to answer the peremptory summons, and he stood for a moment inhospitably barring the way to his sanctum. Curtis noticed how wan he looked in the broad daylight, and how attenuated was his ordinarily spare figure; all the buoyancy of life seemed concentrated in his unusually brilliant eyes and the lines about his sensitive mouth, and, withal, a certain new dignity born of intellectual triumph, which caused him to stand forth from out the shadows of his poor surroundings.

The Philosopher felt this as he peered curiously round the bare apartment to which Granby reluctantly admitted him, but his observant glance travelled without delay to the farther end of the room, where stood the Inventor's work-table.

Instinctively both men moved towards it and faced each other, the table between them, still in unbroken silence, for the moment was a crisis not lightly to be passed over. Here, however, the Inventor was a monarch in his own realm, maintaining his supremacy by the power of his gift, while the Philosopher, forgetful of his *rôle*, was pale and agitated, as befitted one athirst with some passionate desire.

"Time presses," he said at length, forcing his voice to calmness. "Is your work completed?"

"Yes."

"Has it been tested?"

"Only upon myself. I have opened the heat-valve and found its effect wonderfully exhilarating after extraordinary mental energy."

"Is it thoroughly safe?"

"What do you mean by *safe?*" was Granby's counter-question.

"I wish to know if it will act upon the subject mentally and morally without physical detriment."

"It is hard to tell; the very laws of Nature make these forces dependent on one another to a certain extent. That, I should say, is regulated by the disposition; yours, for instance——"

"Being cold," interposed Curtis.

The Inventor shook his head.

"You are not cold. The phlegm in your nature is only a thick super-stratum. The fire beneath is all the more dangerous because smothered. I know you, Gordon Curtis, better than you know yourself."

"You think so, at all events; but that is not the question. Would a high pressure affect me inconveniently? Do not choose your words, Bronson; regard me impersonally."

"Then, candidly—no; a gentler and more pliable nature would feel more keenly the power of such delicate mechanism."

"That is the kind with which we have to deal. May I examine your instrument?"

There was a marked deference in his tone, though his grey eyes looked black, under the influence, probably, of that smothered fire to which Granby referred.

The Inventor detached an old-fashioned locket from his watch chain, and opening it, exhibited the tiny marvel of his skill coiled up within that limited compass.

"Bronson, you are a genius!" exclaimed the Philosopher, in a burst of admiration. "Come with this triumph of yours to my house and we will test it together."

So they passed out into the dusky streets, where lights were just beginning to twinkle. Curtis led the way and his companion followed unresistingly. They paused before a jeweller's shop.

"Help me to purchase a suitable casket for such a gem as yours," said the Philosopher, and Granby found himself looking over a medley of beautiful ornaments.

A locket of exquisite workmanship was at length selected.

"A present for a lady," explained Curtis, in a meaning tone to Granby as they left the place, and no further word was spoken until they were once more sitting in the shadow of the philosopher's library.

Then Granby broke forth.

"So it is a woman on whom you would practice. I tell you, Curtis, once for all, perfect candour regarding your scheme is what I demand before I subvert my highest endeavour to your pleasure."

"You shall have it," returned the other quietly. "The lady is my daughter. I am fond of her in my way—understand that. She is useful to me as an ornament to my home—as mistress of my household; but she has her mother's nature, weak, impressionable—and she loves. That is not well; both you and I have learned the folly of it. Now, from a metaphysical standpoint, I see but one way out of the evil—the cooling of her too ardent spirit by the use of your instrument, without jeopardising my personal comfort or her happiness."

"Is that all?"

"You shall see for yourself. Come."

He lifted a heavy portière, and led his visitor through an unfrequented passage towards a brilliantly-lighted conservatory, and presently they stood in a fairyland of exotics overlooking the splendid drawing-room, which Granby had seen once before. The Philosopher silently pointed beyond. An instant's glance sufficed. Bronson Granby turned fiercely on his tempter.

"Villain!"—he spoke almost in a whisper, but Curtis looked fearfully round, as if the very flowers heard.

"That man—who is he?"

"It seems that you know."

"Her son. Can you not allow the dead to rest?"

"She lives in him, he must be made to feel the sting that has embittered my life. You suffered, too, can you forget?"

"I loved her," repeated Granby dreamily.

The Philosopher suddenly cast away his restraint. "Look there, Bronson! See her hands in his so trustingly! It maddens me. See him bending towards her! Great Heaven! can you stand idle while he wins his happiness so easily?"

"He is like her—the very look and smile. He has her eyes," said Granby softly.

"Aye! so you can trace the resemblance. Come, Bronson, revive your bitter enmity to me. You would not have *her* son marry *my* daughter. You possess the remedy; use it."

Again Bronson Granby opened his locket. This time he took out the little instrument and looked at it curiously.

"It is through her that you would hurt him—through your undying hatred towards the woman who lies in her grave that you would wreak your vengeance on two innocent beings."

"But you have assured me that my daughter will escape unharmed."

"Only with the best part of her life destroyed, the chill of that wonderful capacity for loving, which is a woman's kingdom."

"But the man, Bronson, and the help you promised. Consider what rests upon this moment, your reputation, honour, fame, wealth, everything that could tempt a man. Do not fling them away for a sentiment."

"And I hold so much in my grasp?" questioned Granby. "Then if what you say be true, what will become of them—of him?"

"Do you imagine that I care? I would indeed be more than human."

"As you are less now. Look well, Gordon Curtis. I hold, as you say, subject to my will, fame, wealth, honour, and a subtle power over two souls, a voice in their destiny, and see, I shatter it all in the hand that created it."

He closed his fingers firmly as he spoke, and before Curtis could interpose by word or sign, the tiny thing lay a shapeless mass in the Inventor's outstretched palm.

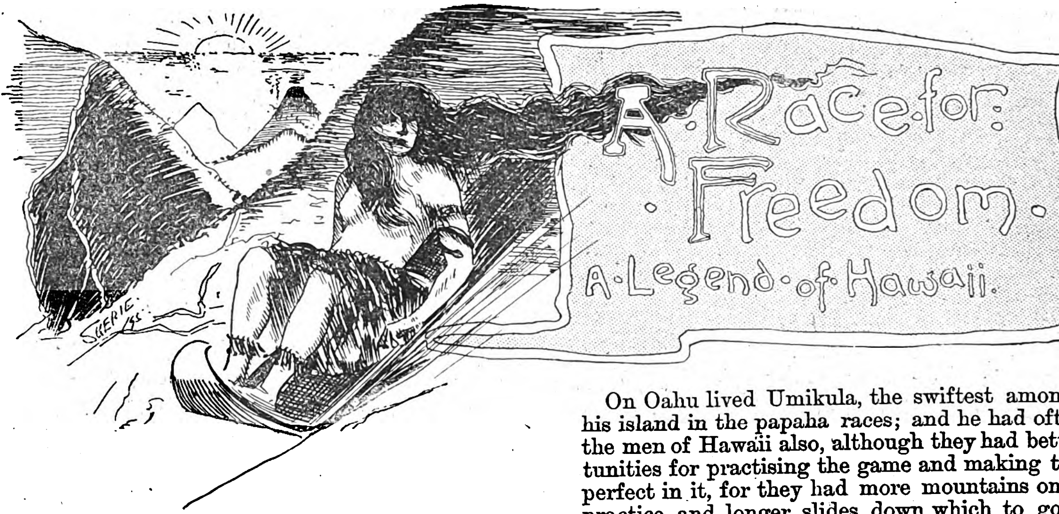
For a moment their eyes met in one deep penetrating gaze.

"Let me pass," said the Inventor, coldly, and Curtis shrank back at his command.

Out into the night air, through the lonely streets, went Bronson Granby, never pausing till his garret door was reached. Here his brief strength failed, and all through the watches of the night he sat half-dazed in his chair, his crushed treasure in his hand, his crushed hopes scattered all about him.

Thus the first rays of the wintry morning found him, pale and cold, but smiling as if at some great victory. That "to-morrow" for which he dared not wait had dawned for him in all the glory of eternal radiance.

P. H.



A Race for Freedom.

A Legend of Hawaii.

FOR many hundreds of years the goddess Pele was in the habit of spending a great part of her time among her mortal friends on one or the other of the islands. Sometimes she would be on Oahu at night, and when the inhabitants of Hawaii awoke the next morning, they would find her among them.

In what way she made her rapid transits no one knew. She had been driven from Maui by her own temper, and had made a vow never to stop upon its shores again. Kauai was never a favourable spot with her, so she had only Hawaii and Oahu left on which to disport herself with mortals. The whole under-world was hers, but somehow it did not seem to satisfy her. She would spend a great deal of time with her mortal friends, and but a short time below.

She was particularly fond of the game called papaha, which was simply sliding down hill as children in cold countries do in winter. I said as they do, but it was not actually the same thing, for the Hawaiians had no snow, and used a different sled. The papaha was simply a piece of board, but of some particular kind of wood which is not now to be found. A board was taken, some six feet long and from ten to fourteen inches wide. This was thinned down at the extremities until it was possible to bend it up, something the shape of the modern toboggan. It was rubbed and oiled until it was as smooth as glass.

The person intending to ride upon this board held it upright in his arm beside him until the word was given to start; then he threw himself and his papaha forward, and slid as swiftly as circumstances would permit to the spot decided on as the end of the race.

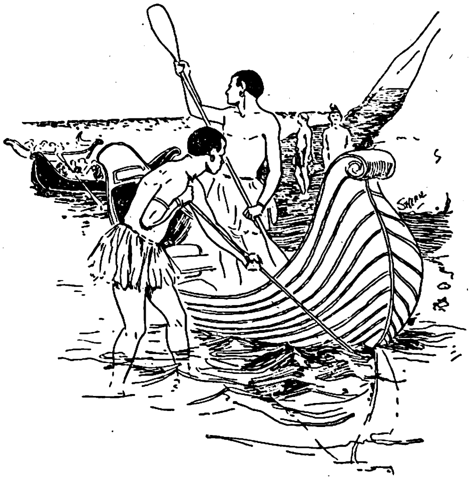
They used to find a place where the steep hillside was covered with the slippery lava, and then, throwing themselves upon their papahas, they would slide, as rapid as light, from the top of the steep to the shore below. It was esteemed a great feat to be able to slide from the top of Kilauea to the seaside (and so I should think it, for it is some twenty miles), and it was one of Pele's greatest pleasures to join in such a race, and to win it over all her mortal competitors.

On Oahu lived Umikula, the swiftest among men of his island in the papaha races; and he had often beaten the men of Hawaii also, although they had better opportunities for practising the game and making themselves perfect in it, for they had more mountains on which to practice, and longer slides down which to go with the speed of the wind. But even with all these advantages, the men of Hawaii had a struggle to keep in front when Umikula of Oahu came to add another laurel, or rather maile leaf, to the crown of victor which he wore so proudly.

One day he started for Hawaii, accompanied by his beautiful young wife, Lahula, and followed by several canoes, in which were crowded numbers of his young friends of both sexes. In olden days it was not necessary for the Hawaiian to labour for his bread. Kind Mother Nature provided for him a bountiful supply of the taro on shore, and the sea gave of her fish in unstinted measure, so that he was well supplied with poi and fish, the two great articles of food for the Hawaiian even to this day.

Because of this abundance of food ready to his hand, he had many hours to spend in pastime, and often great companies would leave one island, and spend weeks and even months visiting among the others of the group.

It was on such an expedition that Umikula was starting on the pleasant morning mentioned above. He had just finished a new papaha, on which he hoped to



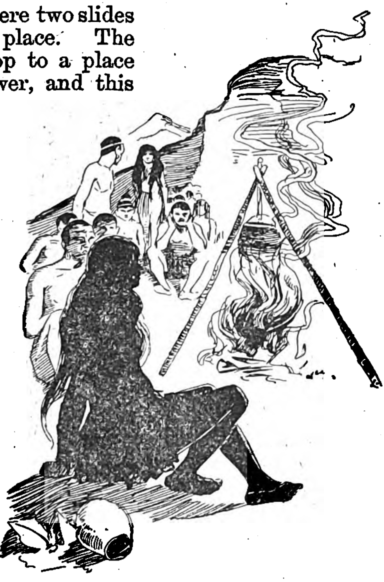
One pleasant morning they landed on Hawaii.

be able to win any race in which he might enter, and for this reason he was going to Hawaii. His wife and the young men and maidens of his immediate family were as sure of his success as himself, and all were going with him to see him defeat the swift men of Hawaii.

One pleasant morning they landed on Hawaii, near the foot of the slope down which the papaha racers were wont to sweep on their swift sleds. It was some twenty miles from the shore to the top of the mountain. This mountain was Kilauea, in whose crater was the favourite home of the great Pele.

The merry party landed, and after resting and eating of the food which they had brought with them, they started up the mountain. There was a great crowd of young people there already, and soon many more were seen on the road leading from the different villages to the top of the mountain.

On this mountain were two slides where the races took place. The easier was from the top to a place some seven miles lower, and this was where it was supposed the races would be to-day. The other track was from a point some two miles below the end of the first track, and ended at the beach. The ground between the lower end of the upper track, and the upper end of the lower track was rough and broken. No one had ever tried to pass over it on the slender papaha. Rocks and broken lava strewed the ground, leaving hardly a foot to pass through.



All gathered round a great fire.

On reaching the summit, Umikula found that the best men of Hawaii were to be pitted against him; but little he cared for that. He felt confident of victory.

All arrangements were made for the races, which were to begin the next day, and were to continue so long as anyone came forward to challenge the winner. This was fair and satisfactory to all parties, and soon all gathered round a great fire to eat and drink, sing and dance, laugh and talk the hours away till morning should come again.

Morning broke, and the merry crowd hastened to prepare all things for the race, which was to take place immediately after sunrise. The finest of the Hawaiian racers was to try against the visitor.

He came forward, a tall, clean-limbed youth, straight as a dart, with a form like burnished bronze, through which every muscle showed like cord beneath the skin. He had never been pitted against Umikula before, but he was champion of his own island, and felt confident of winning the race. He stood poised on one foot, with his polished sled resting lightly against his side. He looked like a young god, and if he won this race his people would almost worship him as one.

Umikula stood forward, and all eyes were turned upon him, friends with pride, opponents with curiosity. As tall as his opponent, he was slightly heavier. He was older, but only by a few years, and his form did not show the slender suppleness which marked that of Kawili; his face was bright and his smile sweet, but his friends knew what the little furrow between his eyes meant. He saw the strength against which he must strive, and was girding himself for the conflict.

Now the word is given, and as with one motion, both sinewy forms are hurled downward, carrying the slight sled forward for many feet with the impetus of that first thrust. Downward they rushed like lightning, the crowd behind them holding their breath in anxious watching for the end. Down, and still down they rushed, swift as the wind, first one and then the other gaining a slight advantage as they swerved from side to side on the slippery track.

Now the path runs for rods beside the steep mountain side, which towers above them grim and grey in its silent majesty; now they skirt along the edge of a precipice which falls sheer and deadly beside them. One false movement and one of them would be cast from the track to be hurled a thousand feet to the bottom of the cliff, where the women would gather round his mangled body with wails of sorrow, telling of the deeds that he had done while living, and of the death that had so suddenly ended all for him.

But both were skilful, and the dangerous place was left behind. The race is half done now; this rock is the half-way mark, and he who passes it first seems likely to win the race. Both strained every nerve to gain here, but in vain. When they passed by, the youths who had run up to the rock earlier in the morning to see the racers pass could scarcely tell which was ahead, for both were equal in the race. Not an inch divided them. The race was still to be won, and the excitement grew higher and higher as the sentinels signalled to those at the top that there was no distance between the two men.

Half-way from the rock to the end, and still the racers were equal, but now it was evident that Kawili was feeling the strain. He had been used to win before he reached the half-way stone, and now the nervous strain was becoming too much for him. He panted, and the veins on his forehead stood out like ropes, while his eyes were strained and bloodshot. From his lips a slight froth flew, and he began to fall behind. Only a little, but still it was behind. Another effort and he gained the lost ground, but that effort was his last. His head fell lower, his sled slowly turned from the path, and the game was lost. Umikula won it, but by scarcely a sled's length. Kawili had given him the hardest race he had ever had.

The friends of Kawili gathered round him, and he was soon restored to himself. He was a generous foeman, and cherished no revengeful feelings towards the man who defeated him.

This ended the racing for the day. It is too hard work for a man to try more than one race the same day, so it is usual to have the race over early in the morning, before it begins to be very hot, and then all hands rest in the middle of the day.

The next morning Umikula rose, and after his bath in the clear water of a spring, which was fed by an underground stream, he went up to the top of the mountain, to the place where the racers started if they intended racing on the upper track.

A great crowd of people were already assembled there, and to them Umikula proclaimed his victory of the previous day, and challenged any competitor who wished to try issues with him, to come forward; if none appeared, he claimed the honour of champion of the islands.

The Hawaiians stood about in silence. They were not too well pleased at the thought that a man from Oahu was able to come and beat them at their own game, and on their own ground. There was no help for it, however, for no one felt like trying to conquer the man who had defeated Kawili.

Umikula was on the point of claiming his title of champion, when suddenly a girl stood among them. From where she came, or how she got to the place where she stood, none could tell. There she was, and she raised her hand for silence, while in a clear voice she called:

"I have heard thy words, O Umikula, and while I wish not to be called champion of Hawaii Nei, still I can defeat thee in a fair race. Give me my choice of papahas, and on the morrow will I show thee how to ride the fleet sled to victory."

As Umikula looked in surprise at her, it suddenly occurred to him that it was Pele. She was disguised, and none else could recognise her, but he knew that no other could speak as she did.

For many days he had not seen her. She had followed him for months, and pressed him to return her love, which she lavished upon him, but in vain. He was but newly wedded to Lahula, the fairest girl on his native Oahu, and he cared nothing for any other; and he knew also how capricious was Pele in her love. She would choose one among the men of his race, and for a time, sometimes long, oftener short, would lavish upon him caresses and gifts, but soon, weary of one lover, she would turn from him and seek another. Well for the discarded one it was if she did not destroy him on parting.

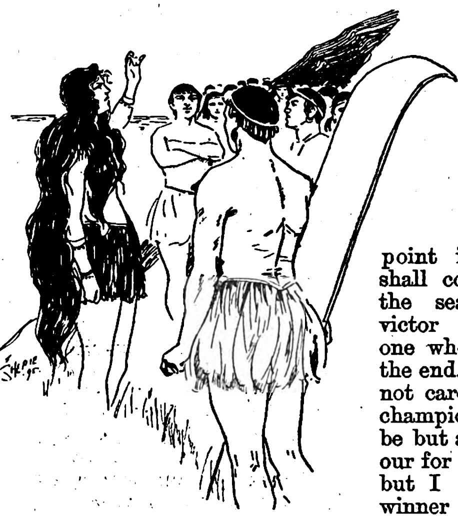
Umikula had been followed by her for months, but at last she seemed tired of beating against the rock of his determination, and had left him in peace. But now she was here again, and no one else seemed to have recognised her. Love may have keen eyes for the loved one, but hate has keener, and will recognise the hated one through a disguise that would mislead even a mother. He knew that Pele must hope that in defeating him she would serve her own purpose, but just what that purpose was he could not imagine.

But he must accept the challenge she made or else allow it to be said that he, the best papaha racer in the kingdom, was afraid to race with a woman. This would be worse than death to his proud spirit, so he quietly accepted the challenge.

Another day of feasting and rejoicing, and then came the morning of the day in which he greatly feared he was to fight against more than mortal power. If he strove against the power of the gods, what chance was there for him to win?

All day he remained apart with Lahula. He at first wished to keep the cause of his trouble from his loving wife, but she won it from him at last. He confessed that he feared that Pele had some secret reason for asking him to make this trial of skill with her, and that he would suffer more than defeat at her hands if he could not find some way in which to bring craft to bear against craft.

When morning came Umikula stood again upon the hilltop, and Pele came forward and stood among the crowd. She asked for silence while the terms of the race were settled upon, and the curious crowd stood waiting for her to speak. Tall and slim as a young tree she stood. Her jetty locks were flung behind her head and reached far below her knees, almost trailing upon the ground. Her dusky cheek was flushed, and her eyes were bright with the thought of the scheme which she was ready to propound.


"Listen, O Hawaiians."

"Listen, O Hawaiians. I wish to give the terms on which I will race with this man from Oahu. The race shall be either to the end of the upper course, or, if either of us wishes, when that point is reached, it shall continue on to the seaboard. The victor shall be the one who first reaches the end. I, if I win, do not care to be called champion. It would be but a barren honour for me, a woman; but I ask that the winner shall have power over the loser, and may demand what he or she will. The loser is to obey any order given by the winner. Wilt thou grant this, O mighty Umikula, who dost wish to be called champion of all these fair islands? Or does thy heart fail thee? Perhaps thou wouldst rather take thy swift canoe and seek thy home on distant Oahu? If so, go, and no more come here to boast of thy prowess, when I, a woman, can cause thee to draw back in fear of defeat."

The taunting words were heard in silence by the assembly. All wondered at the tone of the strange woman. Only Umikula and his friends knew who the speaker was.

They knew that she had taken this taunting tone in order to force Umikula, whom she saw had recognised her, to race with her, and they knew that she had some scheme by which she felt sure of winning the race.

It was soon seen that this scheme must be in making the race from the top of the mountain to the bottom. This would make at least twenty miles, and a part of the distance it was impossible for them to pass on the papaha. This was the way in which Pele evidently hoped to win. She would end the race at the foot of the first track if she was leading at that point; if not, she would insist upon the lower course being added, and hoped that the difficult passage over the two miles between the two courses would so exhaust Umikula that he would be unable to do his best on the lower course.

But this very scheme Lahula had foreseen, and was even now busy providing against it. She had left her husband at the first faint light of dawn, and with her whole crowd of maidens and youths had gone down the mountain side. No one wondered at this, for it was often done. Friends, wishing to see the end of the race, would go below to meet the victor, instead of stopping above to see him start.

Umikula stood in thought a few moments after Pele had ceased speaking; then he stood forth and said:

"I accept thy terms, O goddess, for well I know thee, although thy state and pomp are left behind. I will nevertheless race with thee, and the winner shall have leave to lay his commands upon the loser, and shall be obeyed. I call upon all here to bear witness to this, and to the agreement that each shall run the race as seemeth best at the time."

"We bear witness, we bear witness," called the crowd, who stood astonished at the words of Umikula. None had suspected the goddess in the stately maiden who had come among them, but now they saw her, and felt that Umikula was lost.

He alone seemed to see a chance. He stood tall and stately among them, no sign of trouble upon his brow, a smile just parting his lips. He stood looking intently down the mountain side, and, as the last words were spoken, his keen eyes caught sight of a little column of smoke that rose slowly from the thick forest beside the racecourse. This little sign told him that his faithful wife had succeeded in her task, and was now awaiting his coming.

Straightening up his tall form he asked: "Is the great Pele ready for the race?"

It did not suit Pele that he should be so ready to concede her demands. She feared that he might be better prepared for the task than she had believed, and might have some plan by which he hoped to get the best of her in the coming race.

There was no help for it, however; as she had been the one to give the challenge to this special race, she could not ask to have any changes made at this late hour. She must go through with it as best she could.

"I am ready, O Umikula; and I will now tell thee the command that I shall lay upon thee when at the end of the race, if I am held as victor. I command thee to put aside the woman whom thou hast taken as wife, and that thou shalt come with me where I shall bid thee. This is the command that I shall lay upon thee at the end of the race."

"Haste not, great goddess, to claim an unrun race. I may be the victor. If so, what wilt thou have to say as to the charge that I shall lay upon thee?"

"Boast not, Umikula. Never yet has Pele been defeated by mortal. Think not that thou will be able to do the deed none other has been able to do. The game is mine now, as surely as it will be an hour hence. Send then thy fleet-footed brother to tell the brown girl, for whom thou hast spurned me and my love, that she may be far away before I slay her, as I shall if she dare look twice at thee when thou art mine, won by my skill and power in the race!"

Umikula clenched his hands and bit his lip at these words, but he knew that Pele was striving to make him lose courage and strength by taunting him thus, and he would not allow her to see how much her words affected him.

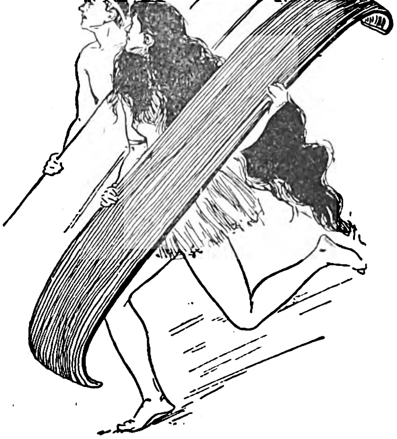
The sun was just rising, and the first beams were shining behind them. In another hour the race would be over, and he would be either free for ever from the power of the angry goddess, or else he would be her helpless slave, and, worse yet, his loved Lahula would be at her mercy. This thought gave him added strength, and he made the last few arrangements and stood ready, waiting for the words of the starter.

Pele also stood waiting, and, as the word was given, both sprang forward as if moved by one spring. Prone upon the slender boards they threw themselves, and the race was begun.

Side by side they flew down the steep mountain. Neither gained an inch for the first half of the distance. When the half-way stone was reached, both boards were still even. To one standing beside the path, it was as if the two forms were upon one papaha. Not a line's breadth to the advantage of either could be discerned.

Still on and on; now they were nearly at the end of the upper course, and still the race was undecided. Now they reached the end, and still it was an even race. Neither showed any sign of stopping. The momentum of the papaha had given them power to run a little way over the rough middle ground, but soon this momentum was gone, and slower and slower the sleds ran. Umikula did not mean to lose any time waiting for the sled to stop, and he sprang up and seized his slender board in his arms and sped forward over the rough lava-strewn ground towards the lower slide.

Pele was a moment behind him, but she was lighter and swifter upon her feet and soon overtook him. Side by side they ran, and each flung the sled to the ground at the lower slidein the same instant.



Soon overtook him.

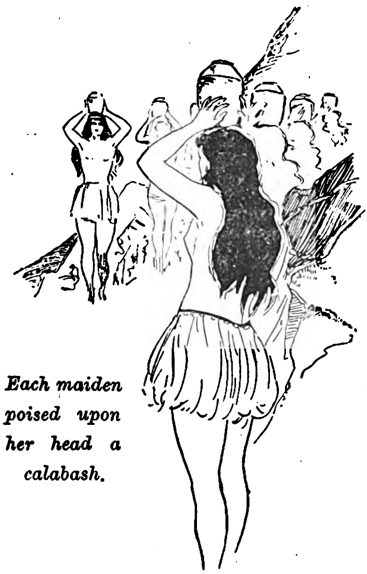
Now it was life or death, for if Pele won Umikula had determined to end his life rather than to leave his wife to the mercy of the fickle Pele.

Still the race was an even one. Neither had the slightest advantage. The only hope for Umikula was that Lahula had succeeded in her attempt to defeat by guile the one whose power made it impossible to win by other means. A third of the distance was passed, and still the two were moving side by side, with no perceptible difference. But now one or the other must forge ahead. They would soon reach a place where it was impossible for them to pass side by side.

The path divided at an immense rock before them. One side of the rock was a narrow path, which seemed to skirt the edge of the precipice, where a movement to one side would be certain death. This path had been called impassable for the racers. The main path was also too narrow for two sleds to glide along side by side. One of the two must fall behind and follow the other. This main path was much longer than the direct path that passed between the rock and precipice. Could one take this inner path, he would gain many rods, but it was never thought of. No one could hope to pass over its length, for there are sharp turns in its course where the slightest swerve meant certain death upon the rocks, thousands of feet below.

As they reached this point, Pele gathered all her force and swept ahead of Umikula. She shouted with joy as she passed, for seemingly this decided the contest. They had been evenly matched all the way from the top of the mountain, and the one who lost the advantage here seemed to have lost the race.

She flew over the track, but Umikula had no idea of falling behind. He turned into the narrow path behind the rock. Death was preferable to defeat at the hands of the ruthless Pele, and this was his only hope. If he could pass safely through this narrow strip, he would gain the lower end of the course some feet before Pele could reach it, and in so reaching it was his only hope.



Each maiden poised upon her head a calabash.

The plan Lahula had resolved upon to aid him required that he pass a given point a little distance ahead of Pele. If he could do this then the race was his.

And he did it. He flew straight as an arrow through the narrow pass and gained the straight course a little ahead of his competitor. Pele had supposed that he was following her hidden by the turns in the path, and was thunderstruck when she saw him dart out of what seemed from her point of view the solid cliff far ahead of her.

The race was nearly ended now, but Pele called to her aid for the first time her supernatural powers, and was gaining upon Umikula.

From the place where the two paths joined, the way was straight to the coast. Half-way from that point was a stretch of ground where it was impossible to turn from the path, as the ground was covered with blocks of lava and by broken rocks for many rods. Beside this place stood Lahula and her companions. There were two lines of them, standing one each side of the path. Each maiden poised upon her head a calabash. The long lines stood motionless as the racers swept down towards them. One more effort, O Umikula, thy faithful wife will aid thee, and the race is thine.

The effort was made. He glided over the path scarcely half-a-dozen lengths before his enemy, but that was distance enough. As he passes he hears the voice of his Lahula: "Courage, courage! The race is thine. I am here and will give it to thee. Pele shall lose the race, and losing it, shall lose all power over thee."

As the words rang out, Lahula raised her hand. As if the motion had given life to the statue-like figures, the two lines on each side bowed forward with raised arms, and each threw from her the contents of the calabash which she had carried upon her head.

They threw the contents upon the track before the swift-coming Pele, and, as she reached the place, her sled ran slower and slower. She strove to drive it forward, but though the track was steep and the rock glassy, she was unable to make any progress. Slower and slower it moved, until at last she stopped, foiled and beaten by a loving woman. The track was covered inches deep for rods in length by sand, which the friends of Umikula, led by his wife, had cast before the goddess to stop her in her career.

She rose from the slim board, and as she rose she saw Umikula spring from his sled at the foot of the hill, and clasp his wife in his arms. But for her the end would have been different. But for her woman's wit, Pele would have conquered, and Umikula would have been a slave.

Pele was defeated. She must bow to the will of a mortal, and, worse yet, must see that mortal stand beside the one whose trick had beaten her, and know that he loved her more even than Pele had hoped to make him love her. Sullenly and slowly she went back up the mountain. At the top she stood aside, waiting for the coming of the victor. Whatever he bade her she must do. And it was her own plan. She herself had made this proposition, and she must abide by it.

Umikula followed her up the mountain, accompanied by her friends, but Lahula would not seek the top. She feared some treachery at the last, and waited below.

When Umikula reached the plain at the top of the mountain, he found the crowd awaiting him. The oldest man of them came forward and greeted him as champion not only of Hawaii, but of all the islands.

Pele stood by with clouded face, waiting to see what task the victor would lay upon her.

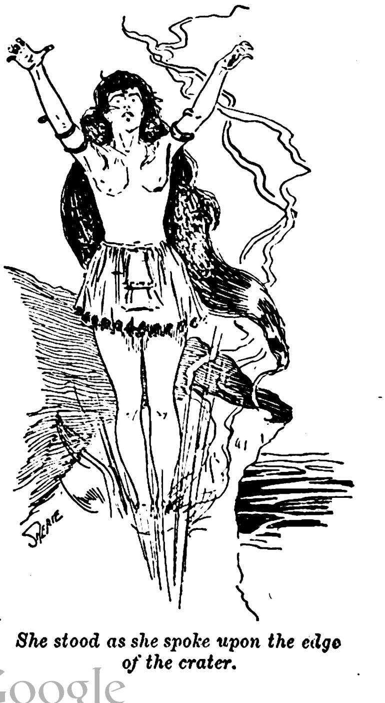
"Pele, it was thy own plan that the vanquished should yield obedience to the victor. As thou hast said, so it shall be. I have won the race from thee, and thou must do whatever I bid thee. Is not this the agreement?"

"It is. I will obey, but beware of my vengeance! I am defeated, but not by thee. I should have won the race had not thy wife tricked me."

"And was not it a trick for thee to strive with thy power against one with only mortal strength? Was the race fair when thou hast all thy power as goddess to bring against me, a mere mortal? But enough of this. I have won the race, and thou art to obey whatever I command. Is it not so?"

"Speak, and I will obey as I agreed."

"Then, Pele, I bid thee to seek thine own home below the fire depths, and command thee never again to seek this upper world. For countless years thou hast made the lives of men in these islands a misery hard to be borne, but now I command thee to seek thy own kind, and to keep thyself to thy kind. Never more mayest thou come among us to make trouble for our wives and to take the love of men for a pastime and then cast the broken lives aside when tired of them. Never more shalt thou darken the day by thy presence. I bid thee go and never return. The under-world is thine. Do as thou wilt with it, but seek no more this fair upper world. This is the command which I lay upon thee, and thou must, by thy own agreement, obey it."



She stood as she spoke upon the edge of the crater.

Pele stood silent. She was caught in her own trap. She herself had said that the vanquished should obey the victor, and she must obey the command that Umikula had given her.

For the last time she looked abroad over the fair islands, which she had loved well. For the last time she stood fair and tall in the light of the sun. Never more could she join in the games and sports of the Hawaiian race. She had loved them much, even while she had been a tyrant over them. But now it was over. She must seek the dark depths of her mountain, and must live in its dismal caverns. No more sunlight, no more happy days in the summer air.

But, though conquered, she was still a goddess, and she would yield as a goddess should. She stood for the last time in the light of the fair day. She looked for the last time, and then raising her head haughtily, she spoke:

"I am conquered and must yield, O Umikula, but beware of the vengeance which I may yet take upon thee and thy crafty wife. I go to return no more. But if I return not, I may send thee a message that will crush thy proud spirit and bow thy haughty head in the dust. Thou hast used thy power relentlessly, but beware of my vengeance."

She stood as she spoke upon the edge of the crater, and as she ended she turned for one farewell look at the sweet world, then plunged into the depths of fire that raged far below.

As she vanished from sight the ground beneath their feet shook with an earthquake shock, and the smoke and steam that rose from the crater almost smothered them.

"Fly, fly, for Pele has called her fiery brothers to avenge her, and we shall be destroyed." This was the cry that rose from the thousand throats, and with one accord the throng fled from the mountain top, seeking safety in the valleys below.

Umikula sprang upon his papaha and flew down the mountain side towards the distant coast, where his wife and many of his friends awaited him. As he fled he looked back at the top of the mountain and was stricken with awe at the sight of the fire and smoke that arose from its depths. Pele was indeed avenging herself, and it seemed as if all on the mountain would be destroyed.

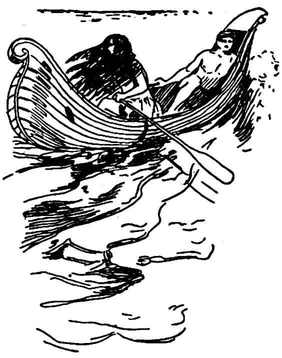
Pele had indeed tried to pour vengeance out upon her conqueror, but she again failed, because the love of Lahula had been working to save Umikula. Lahula had feared that in some way Pele would destroy Umikula when she found he had her in his power, and this was the reason she had declined going to the top of the mountain after the race. She had, instead, gone to the beach and had busied herself in getting all things ready to leave Hawaii at a moment's notice.

When all was ready she rested, and, sitting on the edge of the canoe, looked up towards the mountain top to see if there was any sign of her lord's coming. To her horror, she beheld, instead of the peaceful scene of the morning, one of dread and horror. From the top of the mountain, fire and lava were streaming high into the air. Smoke and steam had almost hidden the face of the earth. A stream of fire was swiftly flowing down the track over which the fateful race had taken place.

But where was Umikula? At the thought of the peril to which he must be exposed, Lahula felt her heart fail her, and she sank almost senseless to the ground. Her companions filled the air with their wails and cries of grief. But suddenly one of them changed from cries of sorrow to shouts of joy. Far up the side of the hill a form appeared swiftly gliding towards them. It was Umikula. He had kept ahead of the fiery torrent, and was still safe.

But would he escape? Would he be able to reach the shore before he was overtaken by the stream of liquid fire? And if he did, would he then be safe? Could they get away from the shore before they were destroyed by the avenging flood? Was it possible?

Had Umikula been alone; had he been left to his own resources, he would have been lost; but he had a faithful wife, who was even then working for his salvation. Down the side of the mountain he flew, with the hot breath of the lava surrounding him; but he was not overtaken. He reached the shore just before the first wave of the glowing lava caught his feet. His wife had been ready for hours, and as she saw that his safety depended upon her, she ordered her companions into the canoes, and when Umikula reached the shore all but one of the canoes were out of the reach of the flood of fire. In that Lahula awaited him, and as he sprang into the frail craft she dipped her paddles deep into the water, and sent the canoe flying out to sea, far beyond the reach of the stream of lava.



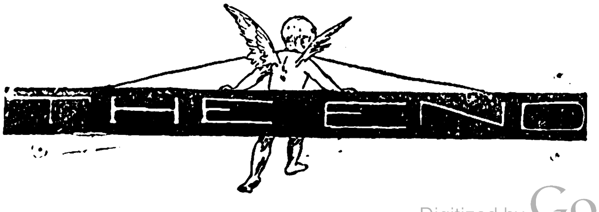
Sent the canoe flying out to sea.

Again had Umikula defeated Pele, and again the defeat was by his wife's love and forethought.

Pele destroyed the villages and buried the valleys under streams of fire and lava that she hurled upon the island in her wrath. Many of the natives who had witnessed her defeat looked their last upon the world on that summer day. She covered the track upon which she had been defeated deep under a stream of ashes and lava, but she did not succeed in destroying the man who had roused her wrath. He escaped in safety, and his children and grandchildren often told the tale I have told you, of Pele's last day in the upper world, and of the love and faithfulness of a woman who had been the cause of her defeat.

I have told you the story as it was told to me under the soft light of the Southern Cross. If you do not believe it, you can see the track down which the racers flew on that sunny morning many, many years ago.

J. P. L.



An Episode of the Strike.

THE soft glow of a tall lamp, crowned with a fearful and wonderful shade of red silk, rested caressingly on the pondering face of Miriam Walcott. She was remarkably pretty at any time, and with the shadows of Colonel Walcott's library as a background, and Jack Pennington as a critic, she was simply faultless.

Jack had been very seriously in love with her as long as he could remember, which must have been fifteen years at least, judging from the fact that when she first dawned upon his boyish horizon she was arrayed in a pink sunbonnet, and had the remains of a dozen mudpies impartially distributed over her face and hands.

Those fifteen years, while serving principally to intensify Jack's adoration, had also brought about an appreciable change in his relations to its object. The faithful swain was now living in a little heaven on earth, miraculously created by a tearful "yes," lately wooed from the girl before him. The chief features of this celestial existence were long *tête-à-têtes*, like the one at present in progress—*tête-à-têtes* in which the most trifling topics became possessed of enormous importance, and almost every occurrence of the day was reviewed in circumstantial detail.

"Bill Flanagan came to see me to-day," remarked Jack, with his elbows on his knees, and his fingers linked under his chin. "He's out of work again, and as blue as possible in consequence. He's the son of our cook, you know."

"I *don't* know," answered his *fiancée* reprovingly, "because I never heard you mention his name before. Why should he come here and bother you about work?"

"Simply because when he first came up to the north of England with two shillings, a lame ankle, and a face as blue as you make them, I took an interest in him, and got him a job in the town; later I found him a place in a neighbouring coal mine. But he's a genius at ill luck. He had scarcely learned his work when the whole crowd were ordered out on strike; and now behold my *protégé* drawing the imposing sum of five shillings a week from a labour union, and boiling with indignation against my old friend, the master of the mine."

"I think strikes are the most absurd, ungrateful things imaginable," observed Miriam, with a frown.

"Not always," answered Jack, giving the fire an encouraging poke, which sent a sharp burst of little sparks up the chimney. "Sometimes the men are in the right, and I believe they are in this case; but perhaps their methods are wrong."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the approaching sound of a firm footfall, and the next moment the tall form of Colonel Walcott filled the doorway.

The colonel was a big, hearty, good-natured old soldier, fond of his pipe and his magazines, and with a decided leaning towards good wine, clever books, and his pretty daughter.

As he entered, Pennington rose slowly, and put out one trim, white hand in greeting.

"Good evening, colonel," he said. "I trust you will excuse the informality of my dropping in to dinner?"

For a moment the colonel made no reply. He simply straightened himself a little, and compressed his lips. Then he said seriously:

"Mr. Pennington, I have something for you to do."

"Certainly, sir, anything in my power," answered the other, surveying his face curiously.

"I may say," continued the older man, "that I am addressing you as your superior officer, not merely as your friend."

With a dim premonition of what was coming, Pennington raised his hand in salute.

"You will report at once at your barracks. All leave of absence has been cancelled. Use your best endeavours to aid in the immediate summoning of your company."

Six hours produced a wonderful change in the ——th. Here and there men were busily rolling blankets, filling haversacks, or carrying boxes of cartridges towards the drill hall.

Five o'clock brought another change. The companies were forming in the open courtyard of the barracks, and in accordance with the order, "Thirty rounds of ball cartridge," on every side men were bending over cases of ammunition, and busy hands were slipping the smooth polished cylinders into place in the leather cartridge boxes. Then followed the flash of swords, sharp words of command, and the ringing of steel-shod rifle butts as the ranks came to "order arms."

Pennington, standing straight as a ramrod, felt his heart swell under his trim uniform. It was a strange situation. Less than twelve hours before he had been sitting in a quiet library, with a fire crackling before him, the little brass tea-kettle singing merrily, and the girl he loved more than all the world at his side.

Complacent and contented in his luxurious surroundings, the rioters, and the possibility of active service for his regiment, had seemed as distant and indefinite as a mirage. Now, shoulder to shoulder with a thousand men, his haversack and canteen at his side, his blanket strapped across his shoulder, and his cartridge-box, heavy with the possibility of a score of deaths, at his belt, the mirage had become a reality, and the man who had learned to believe his hours made for love was facing a duty sterner than any he had ever known.

Meanwhile, the rioters had succeeded in inspiring a very wholesome fear in the minds of their avowed enemies, the companies' officials, the police, and the non-union workmen. Violence hung like a cloud about the pit-mouth, and anxious faces watched from places of security for the attack that was momentarily expected.

Towards the close of the day Jack Pennington found himself, with his own and two other companies of the ——th, guarding one of the miners' tool-sheds. As night fell, and he took his post for sentry duty, the picture was really suggestive of actual war. A light mist crept in from the sea, and shrouded the shabby neighbourhood with a soft white veil, through which the form of the next sentry loomed dimly, and the bivouac fire showed strangely bright with its surrounding group of half illuminated figures.

Pennington, at first alert for approaching footsteps soon found his thoughts drifting back to Colonel Walcott's library. He could feel Miriam's arms around his neck, and hear her whispered "Good-bye, dear; God bless you." Then with a guilty start he remembered his duty. At the same moment he saw a man standing a few paces away. Before he could challenge there came a great crash, the earth reeled madly upwards, and dimly conscious that several of his comrades were running towards him, Pennington pitched heavily sideways, and fell full length upon the ground, his rifle clattering noisily among the stones.

It was a great opportunity for the reporters, and they fell upon it greedily. So it was that the newspapers announced to the startled town that Jack Pennington had been struck with a heavy stone, that his forehead had been torn open, and that he was lying at the point of death, at the very moment when the young gentleman in question, with a strip of court-plaster round the bridge of his nose, was protesting to the sergeant his ability to do sentry duty again. Like most men, the sergeant was easily persuaded when his own inclination seconded his judgment, and less than twenty-four hours after the casualty Jack found himself once more detailed on the first relief of the guard, and stationed at his former post in front of the tool-shed.

"You heard the orders? You will know how to treat anyone disregarding your challenge?" said the officer of the guard; and Jack's expression was not particularly benign as he replied: "I think so—yes."

The hours passed slowly, and Jack was patrolling his post for the third time, when he saw some one approaching him. His sharp "Halt!" brought the man to a temporary standstill, but almost immediately he advanced again. Then came the click of Pennington's rifle as he slipped a cartridge into the chamber. "Halt!" he called again, peremptorily.

For an instant the man stopped. Jack saw him raise his hand and step swiftly forward with an indistinct mutter. Like a flash the sentry's rifle snapped to his shoulder, and then officers were running quickly to the spot, for the first shot had been fired, and a man was lying face downward on the pavement.

"I obeyed orders," said Pennington nervously, as the tall figure of the captain came forward.

"I know you did, sir," was the reply. "You were perfectly right."

"Still living," said a sergeant, stooping over the wounded man. "Here, lend a hand, some of you fellows, and we'll let the surgeon have a look at him."

To Jack left alone, the minutes seemed hours. It is not a pleasant sensation at any time to know that one has the blood of a fellow creature on one's hands. Finally, he was approached by the corporal of the guard, bringing a private from the second relief to take his place, with the message that the wounded man had recovered consciousness, and that he was wanted at once in the hospital.

Mentally marvelling at the summons, Jack went directly to the hospital, and stopped a moment at the door to view the scene within. The man lay on a seat, his shirt torn open, and a surgeon carefully examining a wound in his side. The electric light intensified the pallor of the sufferer's face.

As Jack entered, he raised his head slightly, with a murmured "Misther Pennin'ton."

At the sound of his name the young man stepped quickly into the room.

"Bill Flanagan!" he cried. "Can it be you? Oh, I am so sorry!"

"Don't grieve, surr," answered Bill faintly. "It was me orn fault, shure it was. I read in the paper that ye was dyin', and I kem to giv' meself up. Misther Pennin'ton, surr, it's a lot ye've done for me, and it's a lot I'm afther owin' ye. I'm going fast, but I want yer forgiveness 'fore I'm gone. I t'rew that stone, surr, not knowin' 'twas yerself I hit. 'Twas the papers gev' me to know I'd kilt ye intoirely. I meant no harm to-noight, as thrue as I'm here; but when I heard yer voice I t'ought it was afther bein' a wraith I saw, and I lost me head. Can ye forgive me, surr?"

Jack's voice had a suspicious break in it as he bent over the dying man.

"Bill, my poor fellow," he cried. "God help me, I've killed you!"

The electric lamps dimmed for a moment and then went out. The strikers had cut the wires, and with the failing of the lights Bill Flanagan's soul passed to its eternal rest.

Richard Sibert.

A CHILD OF THE MADONNA.

Mrs. Onofrio stopped stirring the broth, placed the pan in which it simmered on the hob, and hurried into the next room. Remigio had sent up a piping note which, like a good Calabrian mother, Signora Onofrio at once translated as meaning that the young gentleman wanted the *zizze*. Remigio was just forty days old, but it was not this Lenten term that made him wail for milk. It was simply that he was hungry, and his jaws were not equipped for solids.

It may have been a pathetic picture, after a fashion, that of Mrs. Onofrio suckling her tiny son, but it was more comical than beautiful. Remigio had a look of condensed age about him, as if he had been blown in by the centuries. Nobody in the wide, wide world but his mother could have gone so far wrong as to think his plastic face anything but a pain to look upon.

He was swathed like an Indian mummy, or an Indian papoose. White clothes and towels were wrapped closely round his small anatomy and were tightly tied. Only his large downy head and his crimson arms were free. Otherwise Remigio was a rigid system. His small nose was flat against his face, his round eyes looked like glass marbles stuck in a piece of dough, and his mouth was so unnecessarily large that it really seemed clever of the little chap not to let anything escape from it at meal times.

When one looked at Mrs. Onofrio it was evident that Remigio had every right to be a homely baby. Her coarse, black hair was brushed straight back, and made her face, with the high cheek bones and sallow skin, look more pinched and hard. There was a gaunt aspect to her eyes. Her lips, too, were thin and colourless.

Yet when Mrs. Onofrio smiled there was something as sweet and poetic in it as a bluebird in flight. After all the soul is the best beautifier. Perhaps the loss of her first child may have had to do with the good woman's expression. He, too, had been Remigio, and when his mother called her second son by the same name, as if he were an *encore* of his too fleeting predecessor, she may possibly have felt that she was giving the new baby two Saint Remigios to look after him, and that one of them was his little, unknown brother.

But the lot of the Onofrios after they were transplanted to London was not a painful one. In fact, they had what must be considered a prosperous career for inhabitants of the Italian quarter. They lived on the top floor of a house in a street off Hatton Garden. It was owned by a syndicate of Hebrews. Callers on the Onofrios had to toil up six flights of grimy stone steps, each flight with as many joints in it as a yard rule. The staircase was narrow and dirty and dark. On each landing sticky children swarmed like flies round the bunghole of a barrel of treacle. Opposite Mrs. Onofrio lived a tawny-headed Jewish lady, whose personal contribution to the world's population was eight small Israelites. It made Mrs. Onofrio feel very insignificant with her one atomic, beswaddled Remigio.

After one had forged upward through the several strata of tenement house life, advent into the Onofrios' *apartimento* was rather cheering by contrast. For it had a homely, neat, cosy air. There were three rooms. The door from the passage opened at once into the eighteen by twelve kitchen. In the middle of the opposite wall stood the fireplace. At the right of the door the whole space was taken up by a sink, with a permanent washtub, and a wooden table, at which Mrs. Onofrio kneaded the dough for her bread.

At the right, through the door, was visible the bedroom of Signor Onofrio and the good lady, his wife. It was a cheerful, airy room, with a large iron bedstead, painted white. The patchwork quilt was in those gay colours which Italy loves, but fails to use quite as temperately as Nature, and the pillows were large and square, or rather pillow, for there was only one—excellent comment on the conjugal sympathy in which husband and wife dwelt.

On the other side of the kitchen was a much smaller, much darker room. It had hardly anything in it but a bed. A few simple dresses hung upon the wall, and a very modest trunk stood on the floor. Even on a sunny day the light strained into this room but meagrely. Yet here was where Rosella slept, and Rosella was a flower, the sweetest, purest, dearest Italian girl in London. She was Mrs. Onofrio's sister; but Rosella—ah! she was a pretty girl. Large, limpid, innocent eyes with long lashes to them, and her eyebrows set high and delicate in their lines, while her complexion was a clear, warm olive. She was seventeen, and used to sing in the little Italian church. Her voice was not very cultivated, but it was full of Nature's sympathetic fulness. When she arched her eyebrows pathetically, as she sung the *Et Incarnatus est* or the *O Salutaris Hostia* there was a thrill in her tones that made the people in the church pray better.

Something must be said about Signor Onofrio. He had come to England a year before his wife, and at the end of that time had saved enough money to bring her over. He was a good little chap. In fact, the quartette in that little nest at the top of the tenement house were so good as to be almost uninteresting. In the ratio of virtue, Signor and Signora Onofrio were the mean between Remigio, who was only negatively good, of course, considering his forty days, and Rosella, who was good to the verge of sanctity.

Everybody regarded her as almost a little saint, and the family felt that she drew down a blessing on them. There wasn't a stiletto amongst them. The nearest approach to it was a pair of shears. For Guiseppe, who was called "Jo" in the shop, was a cutter. He got ten shillings a day, but it was a good long day. His "boss" was a Hebrew gentleman. Although these wages were far superior to anything Guiseppe could command in Italy, and especially in cold, bleak Calabria, yet living expenses were more, too. But they were a thrifty pair, and the dream of the Onofrios' was to save up enough money to go back to Italy one day, and buy a place of their own. Yes! they hoped some time to have their own vine and fig tree, and die in Italian sunshine.

This is really a great deal about an Italian journeyman cutter, and his homely wife, and his wizened scrap of a baby. But they had the same kind of souls as the millionaires, and though they did not live as far in the city, they were closer neighbours to God than many of these rich people, and were quite as happy.

As the Signora sat in the warmth of the fire, under one of Guiseppe's shirts that waved gently like a flag of truce, patiently letting Remigio get a "good square meal," she heard a light hasty footfall on the stone passage, then the door opened quickly and Rosella came in.

Mrs. Onofrio was almost appalled at seeing that her sister's face was tear-stained. It was such an unusual spectacle—Rosella who always smiled, albeit at times a little sadly. And a pretty face is never improved by tears. Rosella's wasn't. Her slender, well modelled nose was red, and her eyelids swollen by the teardrops that welled over and splashed upon her cheeks. Mrs. Onofrio felt the spectacle as quickly and as keenly as if she had been a man, though, of course, being a woman, it was not so irritating to her.

"What is the matter, *Rosella mia?* What are you crying about?"

Rosella sank into the nearest seat at hand, which chanced to be a camp-stool, and tried to stay her tears. But they oozed forth anew as she said in a choking voice:

"Mrs. Goodridge has discharged me."

"Eh? Didn't you do your work all right?" Mrs. Onofrio adjusted Remigio's stiff little frame as she sat up very straight to attend to this calamity.

"For—for stealing!" sobbed Rosella. The word seemed to stick in her throat, and she ejaculated it quiveringly.

"Stealing!" exclaimed her sister, taking a fierce grasp of Remigio that nearly dislodged him from his supper. What an honest indignation came into her gaunt eyes. She clutched the baby as a thundering Jove might grasp a bolt. "Oh, Rosella! *You* steal! Doesn't she know better than that? Oh, the wicked woman! Bosh!" How finely fierce the frail, thin creature grew at the thought.

"Oh, no, no!" sobbed Rosella quickly, as if averting a malediction. "She can't help it. There was something stolen from the house last Tuesday when I was there all alone," she went on controlling her grief a little, now that the worst had been told. "She had gone out and had let Mary and the cook both have an afternoon off, thinking I could look after the house. She left her purse in the room on the top floor, and when she came back, after I left, she found that it was gone. And she didn't go out until the others had left the house. And the front and back doors were both locked and so were the windows. I was the only one there. How can she help thinking I took it? Oh, Tessa!" cried the poor girl, as it came upon her anew. "Who has done this to ruin me?"

Mrs. Onofrio checked her and exclaimed warmly: "She must have made a mistake about the purse."

"Oh, no, she didn't," and Rosella shook her head sadly. "She remembers too well just what she did. She took it out and laid it on the table in the studio, the top room where she paints, before she changed her gown to go out. She meant to get it after she was dressed, but she never remembered it again until she went into a shop and bought something. And I was alone in the house all the time. And so she thinks I took it. She didn't want to believe it. She told me that she and Mr. Goodridge had almost determined to say nothing about it, thinking I might have taken it under some pressing need. And she only asked me to confess it and promise I would not do so again, and she would still keep me. But, of course, I couldn't confess it, and I couldn't stay with her——"

"*Santa Maria!*" cried Mrs. Onofrio. "Stay with anyone who could think you could steal!"

The good woman felt as if Rosella had discharged an unworthy mistress, which was a dignified way of looking at the thing. "Somebody must have got in," she persisted.

"No," said Rosella sadly. "No one could have got upstairs without my seeing or hearing them, because I sat where I could see the staircase, with the idea of watching the house. I am going up to the church to ask Our Lady to help me," she said, rising and putting her handkerchief, which was now a little ball of moisture, into her pocket. "Oh, it is so cruel!"

A crowd of Italian children, boys and girls, hung round the church door, like honey bees over a patch of clover. There was always this band of small Confessors of the Faith at the portal. The little old-fashioned girls, with longer-skirted and higher-waisted gowns than English children wear, had handkerchiefs of green, or red, or brown, bright with gaudy flowers, over their shoulders. They looked like pigmy matrons. The young urchins wore strange garments and cropped hair, their eyes shining more brightly from the fact that their round faces were a trifle opaque through lack of water. Rosella passed through them rapidly, answering their chirps of greeting with a sad smile, and hastening to the altar of the Madonna, sank upon her knees.

"O, Blessed Mother!" she prayed brokenly, her lustrous eyes upturned to the calm sweetness of the Munich image of the Virgin, "you know what I am suffering, and you can and you will help me!"

And Rosella took her beads from her pocket and began to say the Five Sorrowful Mysteries, that the Mother of God would care for her own. No one could have seen the poor girl as she prayed there in the deserted church, underscoring her prayers with her tears, and have doubted her innocence.

But no one of the earth saw her save the small Paolo Gianelli, who had tip-toed up the aisle, and now stood at her side. The dark humid eyes of Rosella, raised to the face of the Virgin, became conscious of this human presence. Without interrupting her *Aves*, she turned her gaze upon the urchin. She recognised at once the best scholar in her catechism class. Paolo also played the trombone in the boys' band, though where he harboured the wind to do it was a mystery.

"Do yer know where Fath'r Bruno is?" he asked, in a husky whisper. He was a robust Catholic, and good Catholics speak slowly before the Presence on the altar.

"No," said Rosella softly. "Is anybody ill?"

"Fath'r's broke his leg," replied Paolo. "'Nd she wants to see Father Bruno, and find out where they oughter take'm."

"We'll find the Brother and ask him where the Father is, Paolo," said Rosella, rising from her knees. An appeal to her charity was like the touch of a spur to a high-strung horse. Her own affliction made her more than ever responsive to human suffering, though a broken limb did not seem so great an evil to Rosella as being branded a thief. One can go as fast towards Heaven on one leg as two.

Inquiry showed that Father Bruno was out, and that none of the priests that served *Madonna di Loreto* were in.

"I'll go home with you and see your mother, Paolo. Perhaps I can be of some help."

So the young girl walked rapidly with the boy along the dingy streets. He led her to a squalid row of brick houses. Then he shot into a passage between them, so narrow that a man with arms akimbo would brush the walls with his elbows, and emerged into a space which, for want of other name, must be styled a court. Several houses of forlorn aspect ran here parallel with the outside row.

Paolo skipped up the rotten wooden steps of the house directly facing the opening of the passage, and pushed open the door at the right just inside. Rosella followed. Compared to this interior, one of the lowest, cheapest lairs of the poor Italians, the Onofrios seemed to have a grand and luxurious lodging. It was a room not more than twelve by ten. The walls and ceilings were covered with whitewash, save where it had flaked off. Poor and scant as was the furnishing, it crowded the small room. A stove in front of a black mantelpiece glowed a dull red in one spot, and a tin with some cheap broth was bubbling in it. A rude cradle with two barrel hoops across the top stood between the grimy windows. Three or four wooden shelves nailed against the wall made a dresser.

Through an opening at the left was seen a bed which stood nearly four feet from the floor. Another bed, much smaller, was at its feet, but this did not obtrude upon the view. This was the sleeping quarters of the Gianellis, where the father, mother, and five children bestowed themselves at night in a way that would have given points to a sardine-packer.

The baby girl, who was the proud possessor of the cradle, cuddled against her thinly-clad mother as Rosella entered. She had thin curls of a reddish, golden shade. The woman looked distressed. Rosella seated herself unasked, and soon drew forth the simple tale of woe. The woman's husband was a day labourer, and he had fallen and broken his leg, and they had taken him away. She did not know where, and this was worrying the poor creature.

"Why don't you send Paolo up to the place where he worked and let him find out?" said Rosella. She could gauge the income of the family pretty well by the look of the place and the children. Her quick eye had remarked on the round, wooden table, a large circular loaf of bread with a hole in the centre, which had evidently been brought recently from the bakery. That meant nourishment, anyhow, for a day or two. It is not as indestructible a solid as it looked.

Mrs. Gianelli acted on the suggestion. With querulous impatience she told Paolo to go to the place where his father worked and get the desired information, and return as quickly as possible. Rosella remained until the lad returned, cheering up the mother and talking to the children.

Paolo was longer than they expected. He came in at last, and told where they had taken his father. Then he said with some pride: "He must 'a been shoved, if he fell. 'Taint hard to walk round on a roof. I see a woman walking from one house to 'nother."

So it was perfectly natural that Mrs. Gianelli should say, crossly: "What did you stop to look at things for when I told you to hurry back?"

"'Cause I got her caught," replied Paolo, with some importance. "She was a thief."

One of his hearers listened attentively now. The sound of the word "thief" was a scaring one to poor Rosella. She was regarded as one, and her reputation was gone unless Our Lady of Loreto saved her. And then a thought flashed into her mind like an inspiration. Had the good Madonna helped her already?

"Where was she walking?" she exclaimed, her quick Italian emotionality thoroughly aroused.

"On de houses 'n —— Place. I see her from the street; 'nd she slipped down trou' de skylight; 'nd I tole de bobby; 'nd he went to de house 'nd grabbed her."

What an angel Paolo suddenly seemed in Rosella's eyes! Mrs. Goodridge lived in —— Place. Verily, he brought good news. And she reflected quickly that he had come to her even while she was praying to Our Lady of Loreto to clear her fair name.

"Which side of the street were the houses on?" she asked eagerly.

"On de top side," replied the boy. He was feeling the dignity or having discovered a thief, and the glory of setting that instrument of justice, a policeman, into movement against the culprit.

"I must go," cried Rosella, rising impetuously. "I can't stay any longer now," she explained to Mrs. Gianelli. "I've got to do something. But I will come and see you to-morrow. *Addio.*"

She caressed the baby, and stooping, kissed Paolo, somewhat to that young man's surprise. Then she fluttered out. She felt as light as air! She flew along, almost running in her haste to get to Mrs. Goodridge's. But she did not go so rapidly that she had not time for an unuttered thanksgiving to the Mother of God. Why had she not thought of the roof?

She darted up the steep steps of the Goodridge's, out of breath, but with colour in her cheeks, and a clear brightness in her beautiful eyes. There was a vivacity of innocence in her expression that was eloquent. When the woman opened the door Rosella exclaimed, with a pitiful eagerness as she saw her take on the air of virtue confronted with vice: "Won't you ask Mrs. Goodridge if I can see her at once? Oh, *do* hurry, Lizzie."

"Well, you wait there," replied the servant coolly, but with a mean significance, as she closed the door in the girl's face. Rosella did not mind that much. It was the waiting that chafed her.

When she was admitted by the surly maid to Mrs. Goodridge's presence she broke forth: "Oh, Mrs. Goodridge! They caught a woman this afternoon walking on the roof of these houses and slipping into the skylights. She is the one that——"

And then she stopped suddenly. A thought had come into her mind, a most characteristic one. *She* had been accused of being a thief because circumstances were so strongly against her! And she had been so deeply pained that they could not dream she was guilty. Was she not doing that very thing with this woman? Delicate charity is almost absurd in devising excuses for seeming guilt. Perhaps this feminine pedestrian of the tiles was only the New Woman in a novel, eccentric emancipation! A venturesome creature who strolled on the housetops because she was brave and unconventional and loved the purer upper air. Or, perchance, some dauntless maid who took this short route to pay a visit to a neighbouring maid!

Rosella did not quite think these very thoughts, but she did check herself on the brink of passing judgment, and said instead: "Don't you think, dear Mrs. Goodridge, that she may have taken your purse?"

Mrs. Goodridge having heard the story, and not being an idiot, did think so must assuredly.

"I will get Mr. Goodridge to go up to the police-station and find out all he can, Rosella. And you wait here until he comes back," she said, with decision.

Mr. Goodridge did go, and came back with the news that the roof-walker had been searched, and several silver-backed toilet articles, a small watch, and a lace scarf were discovered on her person. None of these harmonised with her garb or appearance. Furthermore, Mr. Goodridge had called on the people who lived in the house on whose top the lady had walked, and they found that just those articles were missing. It was a clear case. The woman had not walked on the roof for mere exercise. The most ardent charity had to admit that.

"There is no doubt that she took the purse, Rosella," said Mrs. Goodridge, "and it will come out when she is brought up for trial. And we both beg your pardon for not believing in you in the face of any suspicious circumstances. In fact, I think we did, although now is a little late to say it. But I want you to come back at once, and we will never doubt you again, my good girl."

Rosella had not felt happier in her life than when she went home in hot haste. But she was not so hurried that she did not slip in at *Madonna di Loreto*, and pour forth a fervent prayer of gratitude to our Lady. And when Mrs. Onofrio heard the news, she was so carried away, that she stood Remigio in the corner, like an umbrella, and wept on her sister's neck. And Remigio, who may have felt the indignity to himself, joined in the weeping, shutting his eyes very tight, and opening his mouth very wide, so that when he recovered his normal appearance, he almost seemed beautiful by contrast. Things are so relative in this world.

Although that was not one of the two nights in the week when they had spaghetti, Mrs Onofrio prepared a huge dish of it with tomatoes, and Parmesan cheese grated over it, and bought a pint bottle of Chianti. When Guiseppe came in at nine to this succulent and extravagant feast and heard the reason thereof, he acquiesced like a trump in the whole thing, and forbore to reflect that it might mean a day longer in returning to Italy. The one regret was that Remigio could only share indirectly in this feast of thanksgiving to *Madonna di Loreto*.

J. J. à B.

THE OUTLAWS' TREASURE

SUMMARY.

The mail train has been robbed between Cornwall and La Grange stations, and £20,000 worth of gold stolen by a gang of desperadoes, headed by two brothers named Mulligan. Two passengers on the train—Adolph Squirrek, *alias* Smith, a detective tracking the Mulligans, and Fred Weldon, a young lawyer—who have struck up an acquaintance on the way, alight at Somerville, where the former stopped at the "Drover," and the latter at his mother's house. During the night a message comes to say that Judge Woodland's horse has come back alone, and Weldon, together with Squirrek and two other men, set out to find him, and discover one of Mulligan's confederates lying senseless on the road. The man, who had made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the judge, is sentenced to forty years' imprisonment. At Judge Woodland's Weldon meets a Spaniard named Alvarido Almanaz, and the two men become rivals for the love of Florence, the judge's daughter. Weldon is inveigled to a lonely bridge near Cornwall, and disappears. Squirrek pays a fruitless visit to the spot. Squirrek arouses the citizens of Cornwall, who make their way to the outlaws' hiding-place. One outlaw is found and killed, and the cabin is set fire to. Squirrek discovers a piece of paper with the following cryptogram: "1——0——1. Cfujk't Bsdfj 50zct Mpqug Vmeds sid Xgjsf Nbg." He afterwards falls in with the two remaining outlaws, and has them arrested. They are lynched by a furious mob. Both Florence Woodland and her father have dreams of Señor Almanaz in connection with Fred Weldon's disappearance. The Señor leaves Somerville professedly for Cuba. He writes from Chicago to Miss Woodland, asking for a solution to the cryptogram. This is sent, but is intercepted by Squirrek, who has been tracking the Señor, and who at last discovers Fred Weldon, more dead than alive. A description of what happened at Devil's Creek is found in his journal. He is secretly removed to No. 19, Blankton Street, but is again tracked by Squirrek.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Caught!

After a careful diagonis of the case, Doctor Butler pronounced Fred Weldon hovering between life and death, where it needed but a breath of wind to sweep him one way or the other. In answer to my inquiry regarding poisoning, he replied:

"It looks very much that way, but I would not say positively that he has been tampered with. Toxicology is a science itself, and the most skilful practitioner would not pronounce judgment in such a case without more data than are before me. Let me examine his medicine."

Strict search failed to discover anything more than a single bottle of what was labelled "Liniment." Doctor Butler smelt and tasted of this for a few moments and then set it down again.

"That's all right; no poison there."

"What is it?"

"Simply a harmless wash for the wound upon his forehead, which is certainly improving very fast."

"I consider that circumstance suspicious in itself," said I. "This Doctor Ruthven certainly uses medicine, and if it were innocuous, and would bear examination, he would not be afraid to leave it here."

"But you saw several bottles at the other place."

"Very true; but that was before he had been alarmed by my visit. He had not then begun to cover up his tracks."

The physician smiled very significantly, but made no reply. He was a man naturally reticent, and whatever thoughts he had, he preferred to keep them to himself.

Having left what medicine was needed, and given his instructions to the nurse, he departed, and I followed shortly after, without having exchanged a word, with the patient.

As the life of Fred Weldon was still in danger, I concluded to send nothing more to his friends until there was a change one way or the other. I had some thought of telegraphing to his mother to come, but Doctor Butler advised against it, and his advice was followed.

At the police headquarters I encountered Runkle, who was impatiently awaiting me.

"This Spaniard has scented danger, and is seeking to get out of the city. I want you to go with me to the terminus to watch for him; I have given half-a-dozen men a description of him, and they are on the look-out."

Glad enough was I to assist in the apprehension of this heartless wretch, who had plunged so many hearts into the lowest depths of woe, and who deserved the severest penalty that it was possible to inflict.

I was well satisfied that if Almanaz knew of the sharp search being made for him he had a good chance of eluding us after all. As every one knows, there are so many avenues of ingress and egress in Chicago, not to mention the numerous haunts of desperate characters, that a fugitive from justice is almost as safe in this great city of the west as if he were in London or New York.

But it was not likely that he had any suspicion of the measures we had instituted, and consequently would not take any extraordinary precautions. It was not at all improbable that at that very moment he was at his hotel packing up ready for flight, but our force was too small to weaken it by sending to see.

Runkle informed me, as we walked along, that Doctor Ruthven had been locked up for the night, but that he would no doubt be liberated on bail in the morning. Nothing as yet had been discovered of any more of the confederates of the Cuban, Almanaz.

We walked rapidly towards the station, like men conscious of the value of time. We were talking together in low tones, when I suddenly placed my hand upon Runkle's arm and checked him.

"What is it?" he asked in a whisper.

"Yonder is our man!"

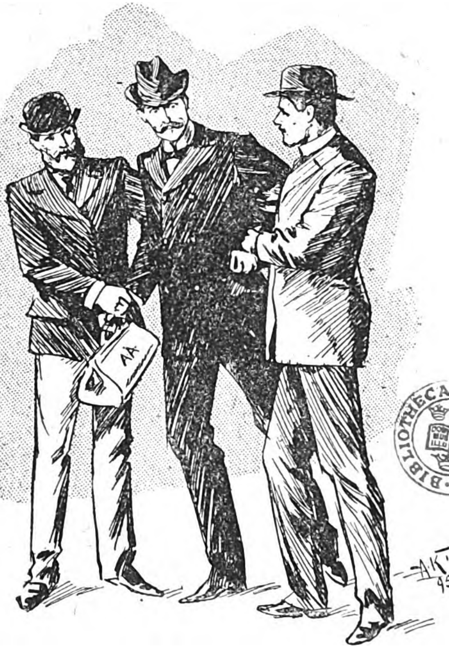
There was no mistaking the identity of the tall figure with bag in hand crossing the street. He took the same direction that we were following when he reached the pavement—evidence that we were none too soon in seeking him at the station.

He was about twenty yards distant, and going at a rate that required our utmost efforts to surpass. We came up, one on either side, and both placed a hand upon his shoulder at the same moment.

"*Señor Almanaz, you are our prisoner!*"

He started as if shot, and stared first at me and then at the other, and was absolutely speechless. Locking arms within his, we wheeled about and started for headquarters.

Still he failed to utter a word until we had nearly reached our destination, when he bristled up and demanded what it all meant. I could see from the glances he cast at me that he suspected my identity, and no doubt understood what our proceedings meant without any enlightenment from us.



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"Señor Almanaz, you are our prisoner!"

We did not reply to his questions, nor take any notice of his threats, but kept him securely between us until he was safe within the walls of the prison. Then we separated, and, as the hour was late, I went to the nearest hotel, where I am sitting writing up my journal before retiring to rest

CHAPTER XXXII.

The End of Almanaz.

Tuesday, November .—Thank a good Providence! Fred Weldon has come up out of the dark valley into which I believed, last evening, he had gone too far to retreat.

The kind old soul, Doctor Butler, tells me that the crisis came about midnight, when he had returned to watch for it. Under beneficent heaven, with the aid of a powerful constitution, which had never been impaired by dissipation, he began to rally, and has continued steadily to improve ever since.

This morning he is still so weak that I concluded not to intrude upon him, but to wait until towards evening.

The doctor says he is flighty, and at times completely astray with his faculties, but his mental equilibrium will be recovered simultaneously with his intellectual, and, unless some unforeseen accident occurs, there is nothing to be feared in his condition.

After my call upon Doctor Butler I dropped in upon Runkle, who met me with rather startling intelligence.

"Upon going to the cell of your Cuban acquaintance I found him dead and cold."

"Suicide?"

"Yes, with the dagger. The fellow was more frightened than he need be, for it isn't likely he would have been hanged."

"The disgrace of the exposure and punishment, which could not fail to follow his arrest, were a thousand times worse than death itself to his proud spirit."

"I suppose so; but it always seems to me that the most foolish thing a man can do is to make away with himself. However, he is gone."

There was no attempt to hunt up the confederates of Alvarid Almanaz, excepting Doctor Ruthven, who easily produced bail, and was allowed to go free. As it would be impossible to prove anything criminal against this man, although it is morally certain that he is one of the most guilty and dangerous men in the community, his connection with our affairs, I suppose, terminates with his walking out of the gaol.

The reports from Doctor Butler continue encouraging, and this evening Fred Weldon and I met on a level for the first time in several weeks. The poor fellow reached out his hand as I took my seat by his bedside.

"Squirrek, you are a good friend of mine," he said, in a feeble voice, while the tears welled up and filled his eyes.

"No better than you are to me."

"Tell me how mother is."

"Perfectly well, by the last accounts. I telegraphed to-day that you were rapidly recovering, and might be expected home in the course of a few days."

"I cannot express to you how much I thank you."

"Then don't try to do so."

"Tell me all about it."

Tell him I did, from beginning to end. It took a long time, and during the recital it would be hard to say which showed the greatest interest—the nurse, the doctor, or Fred Weldon himself. He drew a long sigh of relief when I had finished.

"What an experience has come to me from my getting mixed up in this Mulligan business! But how long before I can go back to Somerville with you?"

"Doctor Butler is the gentleman to answer that question," I laughed, looking towards the physician.

"I see no reason why he should not be able to return the day after to-morrow; but you must not allow yourself to become too much excited, for the reaction cannot fail to set you back again."

"I will endeavour to be careful."

Suddenly the door was pushed hurriedly open; the form of a woman swept by us towards the bed.

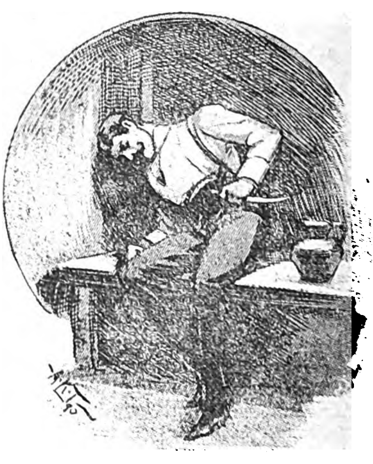
"Oh, my son! my son!"

And, with her arms thrown round the neck of her boy, Mrs. Weldon sobbed as if her heart were bursting, while Fred cast his weak arms round her, and their tears mingled.

For a few moments we were silent, and I am not ashamed to say that my own vision became misty, while Doctor Butler blew his nose again and again, cleared his throat, and fidgeted as though he did not know what to do with himself.

"I am—am—really afraid this is too much for our patient," he said, walking aimlessly about the room.

"It looks as if it were too much for us," I replied, making a poor effort to be cheery.

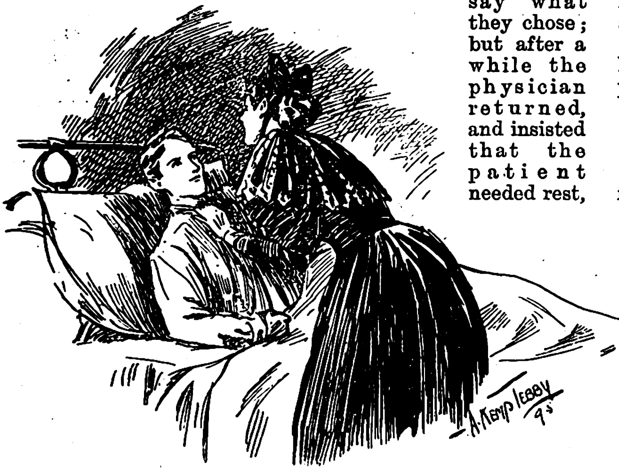


"I found him dead and cold."

The old doctor, however, was fidgety and uneasy, but he saw it was useless to interfere. Such a course might produce more injury than good.

When the tempest of joy had subsided the calm came, and Mrs. Weldon raised her head and looked fondly in the face of her son.

Then the doctor and myself wandered out of the room for a few minutes, until they had been given an opportunity to say what they chose; but after a while the physician returned, and insisted that the patient needed rest, and should not be disturbed any more, at least for a time.



"Oh! my son! my son!"

"To tell the truth," said he, with a serious face, "I am afraid that he has already been put back several days."

But no one else feared any such thing. The radiant countenance of the young man himself proved that it was the best tonic that could have been given him.

As might be expected, Mrs. Weldon would not listen to any arrangement that shut her out from her son.

"By him I shall stay until he is ready to move," she said in her quiet but emphatic manner, "and, then he shall rest his head on my shoulder until he lies in his own bed at Somerville."

"Them's my sentiments," said Fred, who was beginning to feel light-hearted, and was disposed to be facetious. "How are all the folks at home, mother?"

"Especially at Judge Woodland's," I put in; "that's the point he is aiming at."

Mrs. Weldon started, and put her hand in the pocket of her dress.

"Dear me! If I didn't nearly forget it."

"Forgot what?" asked Fred, a flush of interest overspreading his face.

"There! I do believe I have lost it," she added, without heeding his question, and fumbling anxiously in her dress.

"Lost what, mother?"

"Never mind; I don't suppose it is of much importance."

"If you will only tell us what it is, mother, it will be some relief."

"Oh, Fred! did you speak to me? Why Florence gave me a letter for you, and I do believe I have lost it. I don't suppose there was much in it, and if there was, she can tell you when you get back to Somerville. You don't care, my son, do you?"

"Oh, no," was the response.

But I saw plainly enough his keen disappointment, although he did his utmost to conceal it.

"Let me see," said his mother, as if striving to brush up her memory; "where did I put that letter?"

She sat in thought for a few moments, and then drew out of her bosom.

"How came I to forget it? Here it is."

Fred Weldon's hand trembled violently as he opened the letter, despite his determined efforts to appear cool and self-possessed.

I narrowly watched his countenance as he read the few lines within. First there was the intense straining look of interest; then the flash of a new happiness, followed by the serene radiance of young love.

He read it over several times, and then folded and handed it back to his mother, as though it were a business piece of paper in which he had no material concern.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The Detective Finishes his Diary.

In the evening I dropped in and looked upon my young friend. His mother had gone out to procure some delicacy for him, and the nurse was dozing in another chair.

He evidently believed himself alone, and did not notice my knock nor my entrance. As I looked in I saw he was reading the note of Florence Woodland.

He started guiltily when he became aware of my presence, and hurriedly put the missive away. I had enough good taste not to notice his embarrassment.

"I never saw a man improve so fast," I remarked cheerfully. "Are you able to walk?"

"I will soon show you."

With which he rose, and passed round the room several times, with something like his natural, elastic step.

"I should say you will be able to go home to-morrow."

"We have made our arrangements for leaving by the noon train," he replied.

"Has Doctor Butler given his consent?"

"Yes; rather reluctantly, I confess, but the whole thing is settled. You accompany us?"

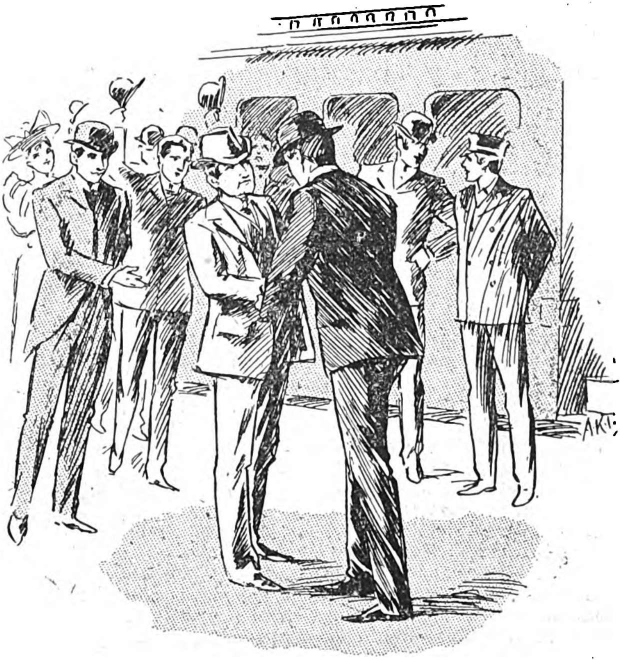
"Yes; my business is not quite finished. There is one little matter that must be attended to."

He looked inquiringly at me, but I did not deem it best to explain at that time.

"By the way, there is a little thing that I ought to mention to you, as I think it will perhaps please you."

"Let me hear it."

"When it became known that you had left our neigh-



It seemed as if the whole town was at the station.

bourhood—and a great many thought you would never return—there was a manifestation of interest and friendship in your welfare so general in its character that you would scarcely believe it."

"Ah!"

"Yes; among all those outside your own family, I do not believe there was a person who suffered more keenly than Florence Woodland."

The arrow struck, and he started and flushed as if detected in a crime.

"I am an older man than you, Fred, and can look at matters more coolly. I took occasion to sound this young lady, and my impression—to make it short—is, that she thinks so much of you, that it only needs a little attention on your part to cause her to think all the world of you."

He stammered out some pointless reply, and then to relieve him, I changed the conversation.

* * * * *

Somerville, October —.—Fred Weldon is in his own room again, so strong and well that he refuses to be put to bed.

It seemed as if the whole town was at the station, and when the young man appeared, the excitement was indescribable. It reminded me of the war times, when some popular general started on his travels.

Such shouting, such hurrahing, such shaking of the hands, such a rush and crush of the swarming multitude, was absolutely fearful.

I feared for the consequences of this upon Weldon, but he stood it well.

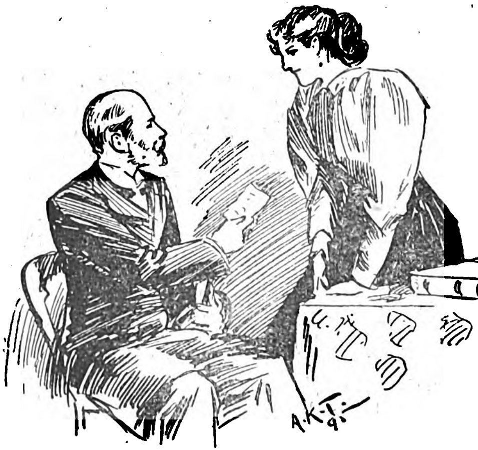
I found a sort of mushroom popularity attached to myself also. Judge Woodland, usually so discreet, had taken the pains to elaborate, at an alarming rate, upon the virtues of his friend Mr. Smith, and I did more smiling and handshaking than I had ever done.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SOLVING THE CYPHER.

ADOLPH SQUIRREK, the detective, took the earliest opportunity to call upon Miss Florence Woodland, to make sure of the translation which had so sorely puzzled him.

The officer was received with the greatest cordiality by both father and daughter, who fully appreciated the service he had rendered the community, he being the main instrument of rooting out the pestilential Mulligan gang.



The detective took it out of his pocket-book.

All saw, too, that he had been the means of saving the life of Fred Weldon, who was given up as dead long ago, and who certainly would have perished had he remained in the hands of Doctor Ruthven and Señor Almanaz for a few days longer.

The unmasking of this villain was a theme for remark for a long time in Somerville. More than one young lady had looked askance but longingly upon the handsome and accomplished Cuban, although there were none who would now admit that they had ever felt anything but contempt for the frivolous fop.

It was evening when the detective entered the parlour of Judge Woodland. The latter was so delighted to meet him that the visitor could scarcely find time to speak with his daughter; but finally he stated his errand.

"Your translation, Miss Woodland, undoubtedly is the correct one," said he, "and yet with it before my eyes, and with the fact that you give the same number of letters that there are figures staring me in the face, I cannot gain any clue to the riddle. Before making use of the information you have given, I have called to ask you to explain it to me."

"Have you the writing with you?" she asked, with a laugh.

The detective took it out of his pocket-book and handed it to her with the question:

"Did I ever tell you where I obtained that?"

"I do not remember that you did."

"It was found on the island, in the cabin that we visited and burned. The minute I placed my eyes upon it I suspected its character; but that did me no good."

"You remember that I sent the reply to Señor Almanaz, and I suppose he has availed himself of it long ago."

"No; I do not think he has."

"Why not?"

"I don't think your letter was received by him."

The detective said nothing more, and the significant tone in which he made the remark rendered it unnecessary.

Miss Woodland carefully examined the cypher for a few moments, and then came and stood beneath the chandelier, Squirrek on one side, and her father and his spectacles on the other, both peering over her shoulders.

"In the first place," said Squirrek, "what is the meaning of those figures at the top?

"1—0—1

"Cfujk't Bsdfj 50zct Mpqug Vmeds sid Xgjsf Nbg."

"That," she replied, in her smiling way, "means that the cypher in the centre stands for a letter, but that in reading the lines below, you are first to take the preceding letter, as it comes in the alphabet, and then the second. Do you understand?" she asked, turning her fair face around so as to confront the bearded and grizzled countenance of the detective.

"Not a word," he laughed.

"I will make it plainer. You see at a glance that, as the letters are written on this slip of paper, they make no sense at all. This proves that they were not intended to do so, but that each letter represents another letter than itself."

"I got that far without help, but no further, and never could if I laboured twenty years."

"Because you didn't go at it the right way."

"Pray tell us *your* plan," said Judge Woodland, who was not the least interested of the party.

"In all such cyphers that I have examined there is always a clue to be found more easily than people think. You can never get it by starting at the beginning, but you must glance at the cypher as a *whole*, and notice its peculiarities."

"And that reminds me," said Judge Woodland, turning towards the detective, "of an exploit of my daughter's in that line which I have never mentioned to you."

"I shall be glad to hear it."

"Have you ever read Edgar A. Poe's story called the 'Gold Bug'?"

"I remember it distinctly."

"You will, then, recall the jumble of figures that are there presented as being found upon a piece of parchment, and as containing some important secret. You will, perhaps, recall also that the story—which, like all of Poe's works, I consider a masterpiece of art—was published in two numbers of a Philadelphia newspaper. The first number contained the cypher, and the second the solution. This was over twenty years ago, before Florence was born; but several years since my housekeeper borrowed the papers containing the 'Gold Bug.' I offered my child the first number, with the promise of a handsome prize if she could make any sense of the figures. I no more dreamed of her doing it than I did of her going to the moon; and yet *she did*."

"That was a feat of which anyone might feel proud."

"And this is the way I did it," said Florence. "I held up the paper and looked at the cypher as I would have examined a small piece of statuary. Anyone could have understood that the figures represented letters. One figure occurring oftener than the others very naturally stood for the letter '*e*,' which is most used in the English language, and so on. You remember the process by which Poe built up his sentences. My solution was not as perfect as his, as, after I made out some of it, I guessed at the rest. There are two points in it which are vulnerable. The figures at the top are of no assistance whatever, and I cannot understand why they were put there, except to remind the writer of the method, if he should ever forget it.

"You notice the '*50zct*' and the '*sid*'; these are the two combinations which I worked upon, asking myself what letters or words they most likely represented. There were two words that almost instantly suggested themselves. The '*sid*' must stand either for '*the*' or '*and*.' I first tried '*and*,' but, comparing the two, found it was impossible to deduce any law or rule for them. I next took '*the*,' and made this discovery:

"The letter '*s*' is the one which immediately precedes '*t*' in the alphabet, '*i*' immediately follows it, and '*d*' again is the next one preceding.

"Here is seen at once a certain method; these three letters, like the first three terms in an arithmetical or geometrical progression, announce the law which governs the others.

"But we will attempt to pierce the mystery at another point, taking the '*50zct*' which I mentioned. This struck me as a measurement of something; the three letters represent inches, feet, yards, rods, or miles. The words '*yards*' and '*rods*' are the only ones which are abbreviated to three letters, as *yds* and *rds*. Trying the last, nothing can be made of it, and we will take up the other, '*yds*.' The letter '*z*' follows '*y*,' '*c*' precedes '*d*,' and '*t*' follows '*s*.'

Here the same thing is discovered, and we see the meaning of the figures, which instruct you to take, instead of the letter you see, the one immediately following it in the alphabet, and then the one preceding it, alternating in this manner all the way through the cypher.

"We will now go back to the beginning, and test the rule. Instead of taking the letter *c* with which it opens, I tried the letter *b*, but saw, after going through the word, that I had begun wrong, so I tried *d*, and in a few seconds had worked out the dreadful word *Devils*; the next proved to be *Creek*, and, following it up, the whole thing read:

"'Devil's Creek, 50 yards north, under the white oak.'"

CHAPTER XXXV.

An Eavesdropper.

"There it all is," added Miss Woodland, handing the paper back to the detective, while all three took their seats, the latter gentleman complimenting the skill of the young lady, and the father looking rather proud of her.

"There is one thing still which I do not understand," said Squirrek. "You translate the figures literally, why is that?"

"I judge that is likely to be correct, as the regular alternation of the letters is continued without any regard to that. If there were a break here, I would have made the same change with them."

"That point is immaterial," replied Squirrek.

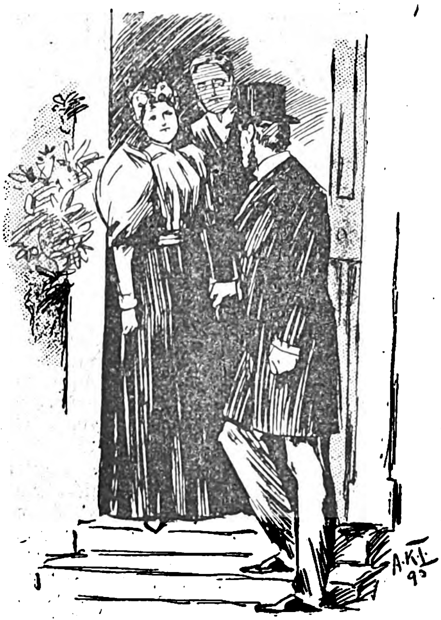
"That is the legacy which the Mulligans left you," laughed the judge.

"I really hope that it may be the key to your fortune, for you surely have earned it."

"I shall not fret myself if this amount to nothing."

"How do you account for such a sentence having been put in cypher?" inquired the judge.

"I presume all of these men knew of its existence, but that it was written by one of the Mulligans, the others understanding that it was the lock to their hidden wealth, and that if anything occurred by which they were sentenced to suffer the penalty of their crimes, they would give the key to their men, so that they might divide the booty among themselves."



He manœuvred somewhat to get a private word with Florence.

"Why has it not been divided, then?"

"You will recollect that the Mulligans were the last who fell into the hands of the committee, so that the necessity did not exist, except, perhaps, in the case of the Cuban."

"Perhaps he has availed himself of the discovery."

"No; he used every entreaty possible to get the secret out of them when they were in gaol, but they resolutely refused to give it to him, and he was led to apply to your daughter."

"What reason or pretext had they for keeping it from him?"

"I don't think he was ever popular with the gang, on account of the peculiar position he occupied, which gave him such an advantage over them; and although fully as wicked as they, yet his tastes were somewhat different, and kept him in a manner apart."

"How was it that they refused to expose him?"

"I wondered that they did not do so, but I suppose it was another version of 'honour among thieves.'"

"I cannot say, Mr. Squirrek, that I understand what this Cuban's real position was," remarked Judge Woodland, inquiringly.

"It was *sui generis*. Furnished with an abundance of funds, and highly accomplished, he moved in the very best society, and was thus given opportunities for making discoveries which proved exceedingly remunerative."

"Ah! I understand."

"At the same time he was enabled to spy out any serious danger which menaced the men."

"When did you first suspect his character?"

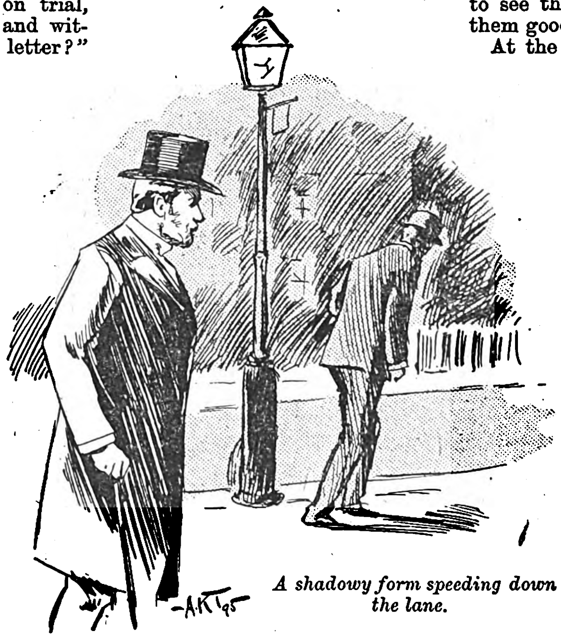
"The evening that I met him for the first time, in this room. I began watching him from the first, and soon learnt what *rôle* he was playing."

"Do you think he had any suspicion of your identity all this time?"

"Yes; for some cause or other he was suspicious of me when I made my appearance in ministerial costume, but I threw him off his guard, and obtruded myself under his very nose, without his dreaming who I was."

"You must have been thoroughly disguised."

"So I was. You remember, judge, that when 'poor Tom Borie,' as he was called, was on trial, the presiding judge, the jury, and witnesses each received a warning letter?"



A shadowy form speeding down the lane.

"Distinctly, and I got one myself, although I never mentioned it before."

"They were all written by one person, and he was Señor Alvarido Almanaz."

"Is it possible? I never suspected it."

"Yes; and your daughter will now understand my reason for calling here one day and looking so attentively through her album."

"I remember you showed a special concern about a piece written by that individual."

"Yes; I was examining the penmanship. Wherever he put his autograph, or made a single letter with his pen, he attempted to disguise his hand, for he was well aware that there was great necessity for his doing so."

"You had no doubt about that?"

"None at all; there were certain ear-marks, as we call them, in all. He was the same person, too, who sent the letter to Fred Weldon, and then betrayed him."

"You amaze me! He richly deserved the fate the rest of the gang received."

"There can be no question about that. Coming frequently in contact with both him and young Weldon, I could not fail to notice the contrast between them."

"I always admired the young man," remarked the judge, in reply to the observation of the detective.

The daughter was silent, looked down, and said nothing.

"He is one of those few young men who improve on acquaintance. He has had two great objects in life, for which he has struggled nobly—one a praiseworthy ambition to make himself an honourable name in his profession; the other, to place his mother beyond the reach of want."

"Fortunately the last incentive exists no longer."

The detective paid no heed to this direct reference to his own generosity, but continued:

"I shall always feel an interest in him, and predict for him, should his life be spared, a brilliant future."

Squirrek did not tarry long at the judge's, but promising to see them as often as he could, bade them good evening.

At the door he manœuvred somewhat to get a private word with Florence, but he found it could not be done without attracting the notice of the old gentleman, and he scorned to appear as though he were taking advantage of such a friend.

"I don't know as they need any help from me," he soliloquised as he walked homewards; "they say that if a couple are intended for each other they will find it out some way or other—sh!"

The detective had forgotten his usual caution in musing upon love affairs, and was reminded of his remissness by the sight of a shadowy form speeding down the lane in front of him.

He was never more startled in his life, because he was taken completely off his guard. The fugitive was too far ahead of him, and going too fast for him to think of pursuing him, so he paused and gazed after him until he speedily vanished in the darkness.

Then, as the detective resumed his journey towards the town, he muttered to himself:

"I do believe that fellow has followed me to Judge Woodland's, and heard every word of our conversation. If so, it looks as if there were going to be trouble."

(*To be concluded.*)

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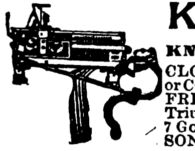

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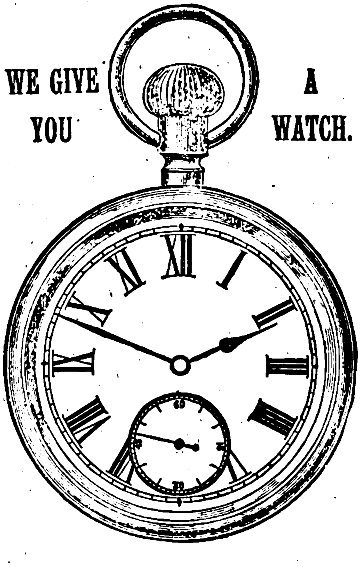

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SHORT STORIES

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Edited by

C. Arthur Pearson.

For the Week ending August 31st, 1895.

ROMANCE
LOVE
ADVENTURE
WAR
HUMOUR
PATHOS

JENS.

THERE had been trouble at the mill that day, and, as usual, I had lost my temper. The men had scowled and muttered among themselves as my harsh words descended on their heads, and many threatening glances had been directed towards me as I was perched upon a pile of lumber, bidding them defiance. The upshot of the quarrel was that I closed the mill for the day, and told them that all who were satisfied to work on the old terms could return to their posts in the morning.

Towards night, however, an uneasy feeling took possession of me. I could not rest. The atmosphere in and about the office seemed stifling and oppressive. I left the mill and went home. On my way I saw groups of workmen gathered at the street corners, all looking at me with menacing glances.

But what did I care for their looks? Were they not dependent upon me and my mill for the bread to satisfy their hunger, and for the rags to cover their bodies? Yes! What did it matter to me whether they worked or not? I could afford to close the mill for years—for ever, if I chose—and still have enough for my every want. I laughed in their faces as I passed, and called them fools.

When I reached home my sister met me at the door. There was an anxious look in her eyes and a tremour in her voice as she greeted me.

"Oh, Edward! is it true that you have had trouble again with the men at the mill?" she asked.

I scanned her face closely before I answered. Yes, our hereditary curse—insanity—shone in her eyes now. It had come upon us at last.

I could hardly repress the cry of pain that sprang to my lips at the discovery. With an effort, however, I calmed myself and kissed her as usual. Then I replied to her question:

"Yes, sister mine. The dogs had the audacity to ask for shorter hours. Of course, I refused them and closed the mill. They can do their loafing now at their own expense, and it will not be long before their empty stomachs will bring them to their senses."

With the subtlety of insanity Clare tried to reason with me that evening. She took the men's part, and pleaded for them so piteously that at last, just to please and quiet her, I consented to accede to some of their unreasonable demands.

At this she came and kissed me, and after a few minutes' conversation on other subjects she left me and retired for the night.

When alone, however, the pent-up feelings that had been tormenting me the whole evening broke loose from all restraint. I vowed then to take a terrible revenge upon the dolts who, by their demands at the mill that day, had so excited Clare, bringing on the crisis that unbalanced her mind.

For years I had been constantly on the watch for the first symptoms of insanity which I knew would come

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sooner or later to my sister or me. The disease was hereditary, and I had always known that one or both of us would become its victim in the end. Oh! how I had prayed, often and often, that it would fall to my lot, and leave my beautiful Clare unscathed; my prayers had been in vain. That night I saw that the fire was kindled and burning which would finally destroy her reason, and leave her a mental wreck.

Clare and I were all in all to each other. Our parents having died when we were children, we were alone in the world. We both knew what was in store for one of us at least some day, but by an unspoken agreement we had never mentioned the subject between us. I am sure, however, that the same thought governed Clare's actions that ruled mine, and that she feared the excitement resultant from the quarrel at the mill would bring on the beginning of the end, never dreaming that the very fear she entertained had effected in her what she dreaded should happen to me.

There was one man especially whom I had marked for punishment—a fellow who had said nothing, but who, I felt satisfied, was at the bottom of the trouble, for he was well fitted by his superior knowledge and attainments to be a leader of the rabble that had threatened me. Adam Morley should suffer for the part he had taken. He did not deceive me by standing apart from the rest, looking on disinterestedly. His acting was too transparent to deceive me—so overdone that it betrayed him and his little scheme.

Yes; the more I thought the matter over the more convinced I become that Morley was the instigator of the trouble, and that he was the man on whom to take revenge. When I had made this perfectly clear to myself I took a knife, a murderous-looking weapon I had picked up one day at the mill, and put it in my pocket. Then drawing my hat well down over my face, I stole noiselessly out of the house.

I knew from former experiences that the mill-hands were yet out in the streets, congregated at the corners, and in the bar-rooms, as usual, when they had a day to themselves.

My judgment of their habits and character was true and correct, for I found them just where I had expected.

The men were gathered in small groups here and there, orderly enough to look at, but I knew from their actions and from the subdued tones in which they were talking that they were planning some new devilry for the next day. I walked along leisurely, although every feeling within me prompted me to rush forward, weapon in hand, and scatter death and destruction among them.

I was just passing a dark doorway when someone reached out and grasped me by the arm, drawing me inside.

"Mr. Zavalla, please do not go away further," a man's voice said, in low tones. "The men have been drinking all day, and are just in the humour to do you some harm if you go among them."

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Adam Morley."

The very man I had come out to find! and here I had found him, or, rather, he had found me. I felt like shouting in exultation at my success. Here we two were standing face to face in the dark, I grasping the knife in my hand ready to strike, and he unsuspecting and defenceless.

Just then someone laid a hand upon my shoulder, and a voice, gentle, but clear and distinct, spoke in my ear:

"Easy, easy, my friend. That would be murder."

At the sound of the voice and the touch of the hand a strange thrill went through me. My arm dropped to my side, and the tumult in my breast seemed to die. A new feeling came over me, a sense of peace and quiet and rest.

"Come, Mr. Zavalla," the speaker continued, "this is no place for you at this time of night. I am going your way, and will keep you company until we reach your house."

The man took my arm. I felt perfectly contented to go with him. When we reached the street, and the light from a gas lamp fell upon him, I looked into his face. He was a perfect stranger to me.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Zavalla," he said, with a smile. "I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Jens. I knew your father intimately at one time, and I hope I may be allowed to call his son also by the name of friend."

"Certainly you may, Mr. Jens," I replied, cordially, feeling drawn to this strange man in an unaccountable manner altogether new to me, for it had always been one of my great difficulties to become on friendly terms with anybody.

I am fully six feet in height, so that, by my side, Jens was a comparatively small man, his head barely reaching up to my shoulder. He was slender in build, with remarkably small hands and feet, and his movements were quick, but sure and exact, free from that nervous flutter which often attends the swift motions of small men.

But the special charm in Jens was his eyes. In darkness or light I seemed to feel them looking at me from the first moment we met. His voice, too, had a peculiar power over my feelings. Whenever its sound reached my ears, no matter how excited I had been just before, a restful feeling would steal over me, and I became cool and collected.

That night Jens somehow gained a mastery over me from which I fear death alone can emancipate me. When we reached my house he followed me inside, at my invitation, of course; but it had been wrung from me by one of his glances and the soft purring murmur of his voice.

I can never tell why I did so, but I confided to Jens all my troubles. We slept in the same room; I in my own bed, he on the sofa—that being his choice. The day was just breaking when I awoke. I lay for a few moments thinking over what had happened the night before, and I felt heartily ashamed of myself for the foolish part I had acted in taking a perfect stranger into my confidence, and giving him a lodging under my roof.

As I pondered, I became convinced that Jens, the pretended friend of my father, was an impostor and a fraud. When I had fully come to this conclusion, it needed only a moment to form the determination that he must leave my house.

With this intention I got up and approached the sofa on which he was lying, apparently sound asleep. When I drew near, however, he turned his face towards me, looking up with his wonderful eyes, and smiling brightly.

"You are an early riser, my friend," he said. "I am inclined that way myself, but not knowing your habits I did not like to disturb you."

I assured him that he would have to get up before the first faint peep of dawn if he expected to find me asleep.

My determination to eject him from my house that morning failed as miserably as it failed every morning after. The look in his eyes, the sound of his voice, his smile of calm assurance disarmed me, and I was helpless.

He became an inmate of my house; he ate my bread, and ruled me by a word or a glance. When he was absent, or I was out of his sight, I hated him, and regretted the day on which I had fallen into his power. Even my beautiful Clare came under his influence.

Jens followed me about wherever I went. In the street, at the office, or in the mills, he was at my heels.

The change in my sister from day to day was fully apparent to my watchful eyes. Often I saw her stealing away from my door on tiptoe, after standing there watching me closely for several minutes. At such times I never looked up from my work, but let her follow out her strange whims without showing her that she had been detected.

One day she had not come to my door as usual for over an hour, and I became uneasy. I went to her room, but she was not there. Then I visited the sitting-room and the library, but found her in neither place. Next I went into the garden. I was stealing along the walk leading to her favourite arbour as noiselessly as possible, so as not to startle her, should I find her there, when the sound of subdued voices reached my ears.

I paused a moment, and crouching down where I stood I peered through the shrubbery. What I saw there I shall never forget as long as life is in me.

Jens held my poor demented sister in his embrace, kissing her again and again, while the blushes came and went on her beautiful face. She was so completely in his power that she did not even struggle to become free or murmur a protest against his outrage. Her bright eyes gleamed with a light I had never seen in them before—half fear, half ecstasy—as she gazed mutely into his.

A resistless longing came over me to grasp the unprincipled scoundrel by the throat. My hands fairly clawed the air, as with a cry of rage upon my lips I dashed through the bushes and rushed towards him.

The cry betrayed me, and his life was saved. The next thing I remember, Jens was bending over me as I lay prostrate upon the ground, his mysterious eyes looking straight into mine, while what seemed to me a taunting smile hovered round the corners of his mouth.

"Come, Edward," he said, "let me assist you to your feet." The tone was more authoritative than any he had ever used to me before.

I did not resist him. I submitted meekly to his command. But in that moment I vowed to take his life at the first opportunity that offered.

From that day I calmly bided my time. Instead of Jens keeping at my heels as heretofore, it was I who never let him out of my sight.

I gave him no opportunity to be alone with my sister, and I could see that it annoyed him. One day, however, when I had been rather more persistent than usual in following him about, he said to me in Clare's presence, as he took her hand in his:

"Edward, I love your sister, and she has promised to become my wife. Have you any objection to our engagement?"

Cruel knave! He had chosen his time and place with keen foresight. With Clare's eyes looking into mine imploringly, and her hands clinging to him trustfully, what answer could I give?

He had wrung consent from me; but that should not save him from the fate I had in store for him. Carefully, imperceptibly, I was weaving a web round him, which would be his doom sooner or later.

One night the opportunity came. The mill was running night and day, through a pressure of work. I resumed my place while the rush lasted, and had chosen the night watch; for that, I knew, would afford me the best chance to get rid of my enemy.

I had the plan perfected to a nicety. There was a long, inclined plane inside the mill into which the slabs and refuse were thrown. At the bottom of this plane was an endless chain that carried the stuff up a sort of lift to the height of over one hundred feet and fully five hundred yards from the mill; thence it was shot down from its elevation into the slab pit below, where a fire was burning constantly, fed by an almost continuous stream of slabs and timber ends.

It was midnight. The mill had been stopped for half an hour while the hands were eating their meal. I had made the rounds of the mill during this time, and had inspected everything. Jens followed me. We had returned to the saw-room and stopped at the edge of the plane.

I carried a hammer in my hand which I had always used during my tour of inspection. As we stopped at the plane I turned suddenly, pointing into space behind us, without saying a word. Jens was thrown off his guard, and looked round.

His back was towards me for a moment. With all my strength I struck him over the head with the hammer, and at the same time, with a push, sent him spinning to the bottom of the plane.

Then I ran to the engineer's station. I pulled the lever, throwing the throttle wide open. The machinery started with such suddenness that belts and pulleys creaked, and the large circular saws hummed and clanged like a thousand bells.

I never stopped to see what happened inside the mill. I ran outside, and thence to a high bank on the river, where I could have a full view of the smoking, burning pit below.

Slab after slab came tumbling over, and shot downwards into the burning mass, but I was looking to see the body of my hated enemy. I saw him at last, but he was standing upright, moving slowly, his form clearly outlined against the starry sky.

Just then there came a terrible roar and hiss. The earth shook and trembled under my feet, and a shower of iron and bricks, of timbers and splinters of wood, fell about me on every side.

I looked round me. The mill was one great blaze of fire. A huge pillar of smoke ascended on the calm night air, bearing the souls of the dead and the groans of the wounded and dying with it towards Heaven.

* * * * *

They say I am mad. They say I am a murderer. Perhaps I am both; perhaps I am neither. They do not hang mad men; however, at least not as long as they have sense enough to behave themselves as such.

* * * * *

I was almost thrown off my guard to-day. Clare visited me—she is as mad as a March hare now—looking as beautiful as ever. Jens was with her. He had a deep, broad scar across his face, and walked with a limp, so that I did not recognise him at first.

But when I saw his eyes I knew him instantly. They stayed with me most of the afternoon. When they were going away, Jens for a moment took his eyes off me. I was about to spring upon him and grasp him by the throat when he turned round again suddenly with the old smile upon his face.

"Remember, Edward, that you must behave like a gentleman, or people will think you are deceiving them," he said.

There must be something in that advice. I will dissect and analyse it by the time poor Clare and that rascally husband of hers visit me again. W. H. H.

IT CAME TO PASS

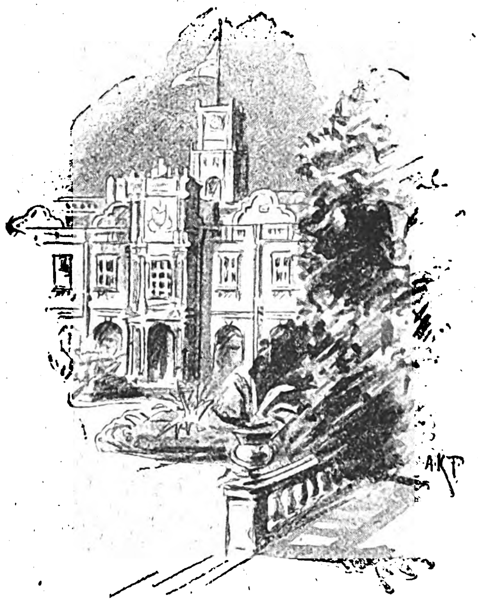
BY WINIFRED GRAHAM

CHAPTER VI.

The two latest comers in the Hotel Mirabeau, St. Moritz, were Mrs. Peel and her invalid step-son.

All sorts and conditions of men had assembled in the large dining-hall, and Charlotte surveyed them curiously, as she took her seat beside Hugh.

Charlotte tried to smile at the frail boy under her care and engage him in conversation, but her lips quivered involuntarily. She had taken the law into her own hands—unfolded the history of his birth, and enforced the journey to save his endangered life. Yet even now he could hardly realise she was not some mysterious visitant from another world. She had donned a loose white gown for comfort, and fastened a soft frill of chiffon round her throat.



The Hotel Mirabeau, St. Moritz.

"What a different atmosphere to smoky London!" said Hugh, at last. "I feel fresh life coursing through my veins already."

"You will soon get strong and well again," she replied, "with complete freedom from worry. I cannot bear to think of your late slavery while that wicked Mrs. Donnington-Bain lived on the fat of the land, and wasted your substance. Did you never love her, Hugh?"

"How could I love such a woman! She is just as hard as a stone. I cannot remember her ever kissing me as a child, or saying a kind word. I grew up unloved, unblessed. But for my musical passion I should have starved for lack of sympathy. During those years I simply lived on the hope of some day appearing before an audience, and when at last the great time came I nearly died of excitement. Every nerve in my body tingled and vibrated through the instrument. I forgot that many millions daily indulged the same flights—men and women whose genius made fame easy and success assured. But this was fortunate, since a sense of inferiority has hindered hundreds from nurturing talent."

"Yes; they aspire to perfection and faint by the way."

Hugh agreed. He had experienced that faintness in the great city of London.

"I met such a sad-looking woman on the staircase," he said, "but she is not among the diners. She seemed almost too weak to walk, and every few steps clung to the banisters, panting. She stared at me blankly, and her lips parted in a half-smothered exclamation. I thought she was going to speak, but she passed on wearily. I glanced back at the foot of the stairs and saw her standing above gazing down with wide wondering eyes. Probably some mutual attraction caused us to turn simultaneously, and yet I fancied she had been watching me longer."

"I dare say we shall find endless opportunities for character-study here. You must point her out to me."

After dinner Hugh saw the stranger again.

"There she is," he whispered, "on that lounge in the window."

"How lonely she looks, poor creature, and what a strangely pathetic expression!"

Her smooth grey hair waved back softly from her forehead, lined with suffering. She was the broken down wreck of a once handsome woman. Occasionally her eyes flashed in the light; they had been bright and piercing in their day. The faded complexion turned a shade greyer as she caught sight of Hugh, while vague anxiety fretted her brow. Charlotte drew nearer.

"I am afraid I stared at your young companion," the pale lady said, addressing her in low hurried tones. "His face startled me. He looks very ill!"

"Yes, I have brought him here for his health."

"That word embraces so much, sometimes merely excusing bad temper, often forestalling death."

Charlotte shivered.

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger. "I had no intention of paining you. It seems such a little thing to me, for I am very ill myself—incurable. I was tired of lying in bed, and got up to-night for an hour. I was racked with a horrible, throbbing pain, and had no one to speak to. I am here quite alone. I heard your young friend coughing on the stairs; it reminded me of a cough I once had myself, and I thought of my mixture. It is very strong and effectual, an American prescription—Jamaica ginger, rum, and honey, etc. I should be very glad if he would try it."

"Thanks," said Charlotte; "it is very good of you."

"He is such a pretty boy," said the stranger, "though he might not appreciate the name."

"He is nineteen years of age."

"Nineteen—only nineteen!"

"He is very musical," Charlotte vouchsafed, glad to distract her own mind by conversation. "Are you fond of the violin?"

"It is my favourite instrument," the lady replied. "I should have taken it up, but painting was more my *forte* as a girl."

"Why 'as a girl'? Surely you have not dropped it?"

"Yes, unfortunately. I haven't touched a brush for nearly twenty years."

"What a pity to neglect your art!"

"My life has been a dreary one—you could not understand how dreary. Perhaps some day you will persuade your young friend to play for me. I should like to hear some music again before I die."

"He is my stepson, and would do anything I asked him. He fancied you seemed ill on the staircase."

"Yes. It was that pain over my heart. He looked as though he wanted to help me, yet hardly dared. Sympathy goes far to alleviate suffering."

Charlotte felt a deep compassion for her, and signed to Hugh to join them.

"I have not yet learned your name," she said, "so I cannot introduce you."

"Mrs. Leigh," was the quick retort; "and yours?"

"Peel—Charlotte Peel."

"Now I seem to know you better," declared Mrs. Leigh, glancing swiftly at Charlotte as she spoke. "I wish I could sit up longer, it is such a pleasure to talk; but I am obliged to retire early. My nights are simply interminable. I try to read, but the few books I have are very dry. A lady here lent me an amusing story which I scanned while in great pain. It actually made me laugh, though a moment later I flung it on the floor, damaging the flimsy paper cover. She has not offered me another since. Your room is No. 150, Mrs. Peel?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Mine is 149, and I saw your luggage taken in. I hope that my being an invalid will not disturb you, as I sometimes cry out loudly in my sleep. I am very nervous, and dream terribly."

She rose with an effort, and held out a blue-veined hand.

"Good-night, Mrs. Peel," she said, a slight quiver in her voice. "I hope you will rest well."

Then she glided from the room like a grey-gowned ghost, closing the door noiselessly behind her.

"What a queer-looking woman," said Charlotte, "and yet she fascinates me. Fancy, Hugh! she says she is dying."

"And possibly already in touch with the other world," he suggested.

"How strange that she should be here alone in such a condition! She must have some friends or relatives."

"Apparently not."

"Poor creature! It makes me feel uncomfortable to think of her."

"You are tired and worried, Mrs. Peel. May I write and acquaint your husband with our movements while you rest? I think you ought to tell him."

"Perhaps; but I will write myself. Heaven knows I do not want to bear malice; but he was so hard, so cruel, and time alone will soften him. I took the only course open to me, and you have no cause for self-reproach. It is best as it is."

"Dear Mrs. Peel, when I think of all the trouble I have brought upon you I wish I had never been born. And what a birth! It is too horrible to think of!"

"Then don't dwell upon it. Live in the present, and try to forget the past. By the way, remember that your name is 'Peel' now, and 'Derringer' no longer."

"Except to the public," he said, with a smile. "I shall hardly know myself as 'Peel.' But you are overcome with fatigue, and I must not keep you talking."

"Before I leave you, promise not to write to Raymond."

"Is it likely I should neglect your wishes after all your goodness? I shall never be able to repay you."

"Then if you wish to please me, say nothing about it," she replied fondly, but though she smiled there was a tremour in her voice.

"Sleep well!" he whispered, pressing her hand. "God bless you."

Charlotte wished him good-night hastily, and turned away to hide her tears.

"Sleep well!" she thought. "Oh! the irony of the words! Could there be any sleep for me with this weight of sorrow on my heart?"

She went silently upstairs, and flinging open her window, gazed out at the black darkness.

"Oh! Raymond! Raymond!" she moaned, forcing back her tears. "I want you so badly. Everything is empty without you. Why—why wouldn't you be kind to me and to your son? Isn't his neglected life a slur on your manhood, and are you not sorry to-night for your forlorn little wife bearing your burden alone?"

She felt he must hear her, as she stretched out her arms to the skies, with a gesture of despair. Then her head sank upon the window-sill, and two or three low sobs shook her frame.

Poor Charlotte Peel! The world seemed very desolate, as a prayer rose from the depths of her heavily-laden spirit.

"Help me, oh, Lord, and soften Raymond's heart! Bring him to me again, for Thy mercy's sake. Bring back the dear departed days of love and happiness."

Her door opened softly, and she started up, half-expecting that her prayer was answered.

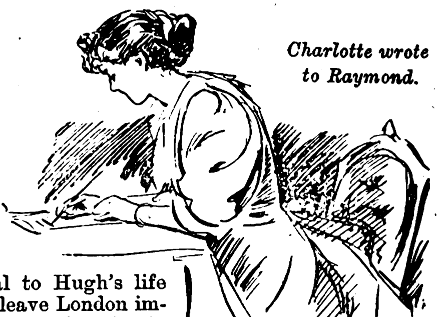
Before her stood a gaunt figure robed in white, with short grey hair falling over her neck, and strange gleaming eyes which sought Charlotte's astonished gaze.

"Mrs. Leigh!" she exclaimed, dashing away her tears.

"Don't be frightened," replied the figure, extending a long thin arm. "I have only brought the cough mixture."

CHAPTER VII.

The following morning Charlotte wrote to Raymond, little guessing in what a fever of suspense he had passed the last few days, or how welcome would be the sight of the familiar hand.



Charlotte wrote to Raymond.

"I am sending our address," she began, "hoping you may have reconsidered your decision. It was essential to Hugh's life that he should leave London immediately, so I brought him to St. Moritz, where I am thankful to say the climate is working wonders. Oh! Raymond, need I tell you how deeply I feel this separation? Never think, dear, that I came away from any lack of affection, for my love is, if possible, strengthened rather than shaken by this great sorrow. I am ready to forget everything if you will come to me and own your son. Why should we cringe to the opinion of the world? So long as I have *you*, my husband, I want nothing more, so let us brave it out together. If you could look into my heart, I know you would come. Every hour the blank in my life grows darker and more dreary, till I fancy the task I have set myself is too hard. I want you Raymond—I want you." Having folded the note with trembling fingers, Charlotte put away her writing materials—a calm, cold look of self-possession on her pale face. She tried not to realise how much depended on his answer, though her heart was like lead, and her body felt chilled and numb. Then remembering the sufferer upstairs, Charlotte sent to inquire for Mrs. Leigh, who proved worse and desired to see her. With ready promptitude she obeyed the summons, her sympathetic heart aching for the lonely woman.

"Forgive me, Mrs. Peel," murmured the invalid feebly, "for troubling you to come. But the doctor is sending a nurse this morning, as I am decidedly weaker, and I fear I may not like her." She stretched out her hand pathetically. "Dear friend, you are so different to an ordinary stranger that I ventured to hope you would stay with me a little. Is it too much to ask?"

Charlotte sat down by the white curtained bed, and took Mrs. Leigh's thin fingers in her own. "No, I am only too glad," she replied, "for I feel very lonely here."

A look of surprise came into Mrs. Leigh's drawn face. Involuntarily she shook her head. "You will never be friendless and deserted as I am," she declared, speaking with a certain grave assurance.

Charlotte shivered as she watched the bright sunshine creep across the room and fall upon the sick bed.

"No, I ought not to complain," she said, "for I am *hoping*" (laying a stress on the word) "that my husband will join us shortly, and in the meanwhile his son is with me. But surely you have some relations or friends, Mrs. Leigh, who would come to you?"

"Not one."

It was a pitiful admission, and brought a flush to the ghastly cheeks. For a moment her voice faltered; then she continued in ordinary tones: "It must seem very strange to you that I am left to die alone, but I suppose I have escaped love. It is the painful consequence of a wasted existence."

"You may have done good without knowing it," murmured Charlotte soothingly, "for few lives are utterly useless. Example alone goes a long way."

"Unfortunately it is not so with me, and I have only myself to blame for a loveless old age. I have a history, Mrs. Peel, a miserably sad story, of which I never speak. Are you content to befriend a dying woman who has sinned in the past, since death"—with a faint smile—"must shortly divide us?"

Charlotte felt the speaker's burning hand tighten on her arm, and pity for the sinking life welled into her eyes. She had grown fond of her in a single night, and determined, whatever her history, to cheer these last days of pain.

"You could never guess what I have endured," continued Mrs. Leigh, in answer to a sympathetic word from her listener. "I have suffered so long and so deeply that I cannot weep or cry or wring my hands, or go through any of the pantomime of grief. Three days ago the tears came to my eyes for the first time during the last ten years. A little girl in the gardens put her arms round my neck and kissed me. Perpetual sorrow has a hardening effect, which only a child can soften."

"Then you are very fond of children?"

A sudden light came into her eyes.

"Oh! yes. They are so perfectly unconscious of disgrace or sin. But tell me, Mrs. Peel, have you a good husband?"

She asked the question abruptly. For a moment it remained unanswered.

"What do you call good?"

"Does he love as he should? Is he kind and considerate?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Charlotte, without hesitation. "We have had but one dispute since our marriage, and his very faults are ten times dearer to me than another's virtues."

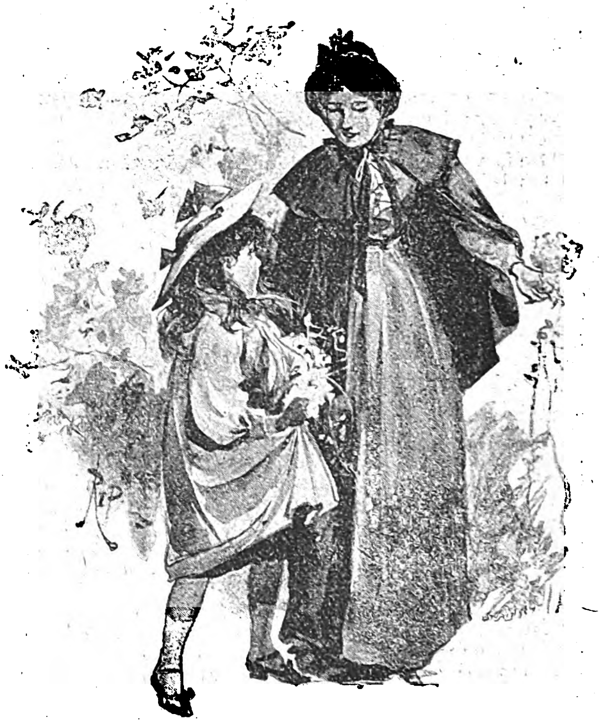
"Happy woman. How few wives could say the same."

"Your husband is dead, I believe?"

There was silence in the room, and Charlottte, turning to Mrs. Leigh, saw her lying back among the pillows, with her face in the shadow. Her eyes were closed, she was feigning sleep. Presently she stirred uneasily, and reopened them.

"How foolishly weak I am—like a fly in late autumn," she declared, forcing a strained smile. "The poor doomed creatures crawl about waiting for the end."

Charlotte tactfully refrained from returning to the subject, though Mrs. Leigh's unknown sorrow was ever present to her mind. She pictured a life, without hope, without joy, without even tears, and the vision appalled her!



A little girl in the gardens.

The door opened, and a bright-faced nurse entered.

Mrs. Leigh raised herself, eyeing the new-comer critically.

"You are just like a doll I once dressed for a bazaar," she said, "with white strings to its bonnet, and a nurse's frock. That was in my early married life. Everything happened twenty years ago!"

With a farewell word, Mrs. Peel glided from the room.

"That poor woman was quite light-headed this morning, she will not live many days," Charlotte told Hugh.

"Come out and forget that all the world's a hospital," he replied. "Do you know I am so relieved to think you have written to your husband? I could not rest until he knew our whereabouts."

"What will he answer?" Charlotte wondered, painfully conscious of the weight upon her heart.

"Who is that fair-haired girl in the window?" asked Hugh. "What a sweet face—just like a little wax doll!"

"Mrs. Leigh said the same. She is the nurse in 149."

CHAPTER VIII.

NURSE EVELYN supplied Mrs. Peel with details of her patient's case.

"You have come to be near her, I suppose?" she said one morning, pausing on the landing for a moment's conversation.

"Oh! no," replied Charlotte. "I only met her here by chance, and was struck by her forlorn condition."

The nurse raised her eyebrows.

"Really! Yet she speaks of you constantly, even in her sleep. She has also told me about your stepson."

"Indeed!" said Charlotte. "She felt interested in him, poor fellow, for he is consumptive, you know."

Yes; Nurse Evelyn knew. She heard his cough on the staircase as she crept noiselessly back to the sick chamber, with flowers from Charlotte in her hand.

"I am better this morning, nurse," murmured Mrs. Leigh. "Won't you sit by my bed and talk? My life has been very silent, and I love a cheerful voice. Have you seen young Mr. Peel to-day?—the boy with the face of an angel."

"I noticed a gentleman in the garden with Mrs. Peel. He glanced up at the window, and certainly his profile was singularly striking—more like a girl's than a man's."

"Good people deserve to be beautiful," she replied gloomily. "I lost my looks twenty years ago, and ever since then life has been one long spell of atonement."

"You must not dwell upon sad subjects," said Nurse Evelyn, kindly but firmly.

"I like them—they are in keeping with my mood. Won't you tell me of your experiences at the hospital in England?"

Nurse Evelyn's face brightened, for she loved to talk of her calling.

"Children were my chief charge there," she began, folding her hands across her knees, "such dear little creatures! I remember my mother visiting me once, and going the round of the cots. A curly haired boy who was up and running about pointed to a small patient lying very ill, and said:

"'Tommy went to the theatre yesterday, ma'am.'

"'How nice for Tommy!' replied my mother, smiling at the sick child, whose convalescent companion appeared vastly amused.

"'It ain't that sort of theatre,' he continued cheerfully. 'I means the place downstairs, where they puts yer to sleep whether you will or no, and cuts yer up!' I never liked carrying the children to the operating room, they clung round my neck and cried."

"I adore children!" said Mrs. Leigh.

"Have you none of your own?" asked nurse Evelyn.

The sick woman quailed at the question, her face blanched, as she leant back panting.

"This pain across my heart is killing me!" she moaned.

It was the remembrance of a secret sorrow that drove her to the verge of delirium as she closed her eyes and dropped into a heavy stupor, murmuring, half inarticulately:

"Ask me no questions—*no* questions!" she cried. "Why will they worry me? Your husband is dead, I believe? Have you no children? Oh, those questions—those questions!"

Nurse Evelyn's professional ears caught the gist of her patient's ramblings.

"Nurse," she cried at last. "Nurse, have I incriminated myself?"

"No," came the soft reply, and a cool hand was laid on her burning forehead, as with faltering footsteps, as it were, Mrs. Leigh returned to the realisation of the present.

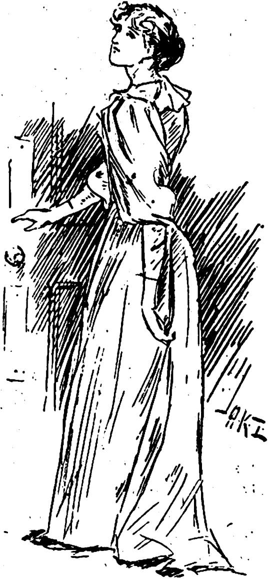
* * * * *

Raymond was worn out with sleepless nights and fruitless searching; his deserted house seemed like an empty tomb. He fancied Charlotte's presence lurked in every corner, and occasionally started up, imagining he heard her voice, or saw her standing before him with outstretched arms. Every post he watched eagerly; even when out his servants had directions to follow him with letters, that not a moment might be lost should Charlotte proffer an olive branch.

James the butler was in a high state of indignation at Mrs. Peel's conduct, enlarging daily in the servant's hall upon "Master's hevident hanxiety."

"What about dinner to-night, James?" asked the footman, in unusually subdued tones.

"Master went out to that church opposite," replied James stolidly. "I watched him across the road" (with an ominous shake of his head). "All these years as I've been in his service I never knew him to do that of a week day. It's a bad sign, depend upon it, a very bad sign. Missus used to like them Wednesday evening services, and I suppose 'e remembered it to-night."



Saw her standing before him.

"It's my opinion she's committed suicide," declared Parker, the younger man. "Women are that fanciful, especially when they're married; they gets queer ideas and rum notions. Look at cook! She drove her husband to his grave in three months."

Parker had a poor opinion of the weaker sex, having read of meddlesome females who lecture on man's delinquencies, and considered cook the latest form of an emancipated woman. James, on the other hand, admired the victim of Parker's disparaging remarks, and grew hot at the sneer.

"Mrs. Blundelberry is a thoroughly domesticated and highly educated pusson!" he declared emphatically, "and if it wasn't that we were both so well placed in present circumstances, I would make her Mrs. James Jellicoe to-morrow!"

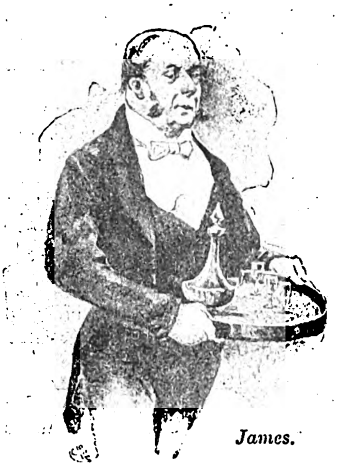
Having delivered himself of this astounding sentiment, he left Parker open-mouthed, as the postman's rap fell on his vigilant ears.

He scanned the contents of the letter-box.

"My stars! here's missus's fist at last! I'd know that 'P' in a thousand. Thank the Lord! Parker was wrong, for suicides can't write nohow."

Breathless and hatless he fled across the street, bearing the precious missive in his hand. Raymond was kneeling in the sacred edifice, with bent head and folded hands, praying as he had never prayed in his life before for the safe return of his absent wife.

A woman's face in the stained glass window above him brought Charlotte vividly to his mind. Was it a virgin mother—a Magdalen or Martha? No. It was Charlotte—his Charlotte, looking down with sweet forgiving eyes. As he gazed on the figure wrapt in thought, James Jellicoe's stealthy footsteps crept softly up the aisle. A hand was laid on his elbow, a hand which contained the wealth of the world for Raymond—the letter from St. Moritz



James.

(*To be concluded.*)

An Amateur Scoundrel

MLLE. DAUREL stopped in front of the post office. Her right hand held up her skirts. She released them with a sudden movement and thrust her hand into her muff, which she held in her left hand. At the same moment she uttered a cry of surprise. The little purse that she always carried in her muff was no longer there.

"Oh!" she cried, looking to the right and to the left. A few feet away from there stood a man of about fifty years of age, clean shaven, stout, and well dressed. He was looking at her attentively. Then he suddenly came towards her, and with a polite bow and an evil smile he said:

"Mademoiselle, I live near by, in the Rue de la Michodiere, No. 60—M. Chouinot; man of business. If you desire to have news regarding the purse you have been so unfortunate as to lose I can furnish it to you."

M. Chouinot was a fine specimen of a rascal. It must be confessed life was difficult for him. He had endeavoured to make a success of several enterprises, but every time, just as the longed-for end was in view, an obstacle had arisen and overwhelmed him. That obstacle was Justice.

The clients whom he had attempted to dupe had made complaints to the police, and the police had started investigations which had finally brought M. Chouinot face to face with the superintendent of police, the judge on the bench, and then the prison of Mazas. Happily, he had so far been able to avoid long terms of imprisonment, which was something, but he had been obliged in every case to disgorge his gain and restore to their rightful owners the sums of money that had been confided by them to his care.

In short, he had so far been successful only in putting to one side his scruples.

That day he was walking behind Mlle. Daurel. Was he looking at her? It is probable that he was, for Mlle. Daurel deserved it. Rarely has a more charming woman been seen.

That she had the appearance of a smart woman, a supple and graceful figure, beautifully proportioned, could be seen from her back. In front it was seen that she had a lovely face, dark ardent eyes, an adorably chiselled nose, a fine mouth, and besides these an infinite and subtle charm that was indefinable. She was a woman no man could help looking at.

So, as has been said already, M. Chouinot was walking behind Mlle. Daurel. Suddenly he saw that she had dropped something on the pavement. He was about to call her attention to the fact when an idea presented itself to his mind.

"Never trust a first impulse," thought he.

No one happened to be passing at the moment! Why should he not take possession of the article, provided it was worth the trouble?

M. Chouinot opened the purse. For it was a purse that Mlle. Daurel had let fall—a pretty little purse with her name on it in neat silver letters. It contained a fifty franc bank-note, several scraps of paper, and a letter in an envelope ready to be posted.

M. Chouinot rapidly looked over the pieces of paper. They were letters that showed signs of having been read and re-read many times. They were almost in pieces, and all bore the same signature, Henri.

The letter in the envelope was addressed to M. Henri de Prejailles.

So the owner of the purse was answering love-letters?

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed M. Chouinot to himself. Then he found some cards bearing the name "Mlle. Daurel," and M. Chouinot began to think deeply.

"Mlle. Daurel to a male friend, Henri de Prejailles, who is bitterly opposed by her father. Excellent affair!"

Without a tremour he opened the envelope, and taking out the letter began to read.

"It remains to be seen now whether Mlle. Daurel is rich," said M. Chouinot to himself. "In any case it will be sufficient if her friend is. Henri de Prejailles sounds well. I will find this out as quickly as possible."

Talking thus to himself, M. Chouinot kept following Mlle. Daurel. When he saw her stop in front of the Post Office, he stopped too. It was the decisive moment.

"She wants to post her letters now, and discovers that her purse is lost," continued M. Chouinot in monologue. "I will approach her very politely and beg her to come to my office for news of the lost article. There I shall tell her my conditions."

M. Chouinot's deductions were perfectly accurate. Is it necessary to say that when Mlle. Daurel heard M. Chouinot address her, she turned in surprise, which rapidly changed to confusion and terror, and left her without a word of reply.

As soon as she recovered her self-possession, M. Chouinot, who had turned upon his heel as soon as his little speech was concluded, was already disappearing down the street.

Thus she found herself at the mercy of this man. Doubtless he had opened the purse, had read her letters, and now would only restore them to her in return for a large reward. Mlle. Daurel faced the situation.

"There is no use hesitating," she thought; "I must go to this man." And she went.

M. Chouinot was waiting for her, and as soon as she had made known her name she was introduced into the private office of the man of business.

M. Chouinot rose to meet her and bowed.

"Here is your purse," he said to her, holding out the article he had picked up shortly before on the pavement.

Mlle. Daurel, a little surprised, was about to thank him warmly, when he began:

"I hand you back your purse, but honesty compels me to state that it does not return to you intact. It still contains, indeed, the note for fifty francs, because money is always sacred. You will also find here your visiting cards. But I thought it was imprudent of you to keep your letters there. An indiscretion is so easily committed. Therefore, I will take care of them for you—oh, the utmost care, I assure you!"

Mlle. Daurel understood. The man had laid a trap for her, and she had tumbled into it.

"But, monsieur," she stammered, "the purse you have picked up is my property. You have no right to keep it, whatever it may contain."

"You think so?"

"I can go to the police, and they will force you to give me back those letters."

"And I can go to the police, and tell them that I picked up nothing; that I know nothing of any purse, and that I, M. Chouinot, a business man, am above all suspicion of such things."

Mlle. Daurel did not insist on this point.

"But," she said, "why do you keep those letters? They have no interest for you. I assure you——"

"Letters of that sort, I assure you, are very nice to keep. M. Henri de Prejailles writes most interestingly, and your own style, madame, is delightful."

Mlle. Daurel flushed. She had loosened for a brief second her grasp on the purse, and that little moment of negligence was going to cost her dearly.

"You forget," continued M. Chouinot, "that everybody who recovers a lost article is entitled to a reward."

"I am prepared to give it to you, monsieur."

"Agreed. But there are rewards and rewards. I think the correspondence of Mlle. Daurel and Henri de Prejailles is worth a good price."

"Oh! monsieur—"

"A very high price, I repeat. For 20,000 francs I will return you your letters. Otherwise I will give them to your father."

Mlle. Daurel became furious.

"But it is a swindle!" she shrieked.

"That is a hasty word for such an exquisite mouth."

"Wretch!"

And Mlle. Daurel threw one of her cards in the face of M. Chouinot. The man of business remained calm and said:

"A second card is useless; I have already taken one. Twenty thousand francs, I repeat. M. Daurel is a builder and rich! 20,000 francs is nothing to him!"

This was said quietly and with calm cynicism.

After her anger a reaction had followed, and Mlle. Daurel grew quiet. She was frightened now, panting and overwhelmed; M. Chouinot did not move or say a word. She sank down on a chair, with her eyes on the ground, listening to this man as if she was being sentenced to death.

Then there was a silence, and Mlle. Daurel rose and walked towards the door. What was she going to do?

That was what M. Chouinot wanted to know.

Several hours later she would return. Probably she would try and bargain with him for 15,000 or 10,000 francs. But he, M. Chouinot, would remain unalterable, 20,000 francs.

And Mlle. Daurel would spread out on the table, not without regrets, twenty banknotes of 1,000 francs each.

At the thought of this M. Chouinot rubbed his hands.

"I am a lucky man; twenty thousand francs for merely picking up a purse."

But the hours passed, and Mlle. Daurel did not return. Probably she needed more time to get the money.

Meanwhile M. Chouinot sang to himself while he waited.

Presently an employé of the office came in.

"Monsieur, there is someone asking for you outside."

"The girl, no doubt?"

"No, sir; it is a gentleman!"

"A gentleman? Show him in."

The visitor came into the office.

"Monsieur," he said, looking M. Chouinot in the eye, "I am M. Henri de Prejailles!"

The man of business took a step backward.

"Oh, do not be afraid. I have no intention of administering to you the thrashing you so richly deserve. It gives me pleasure, however, to say that you are an infamous villain. Having said this, I ask you now to follow me."

"Monsieur!"

M. Chouinot moved further and further away.

Henry de Prejailles took a pistol out of his pocket and put the end of it under M. Chouinot's nose.

"Will you follow me?"

"I will follow you, monsieur; but remember one thing, that your letters are in a safe place, and that you cannot force me to give them up, and—"

"Exactly; meanwhile, walk in front of me, and not a word, or I will shoot you like a dog!"

Below a carriage was in attendance, and M. Chouinot got in. Henri de Prejailles took the seat next him.

"Coachman, drive to Rue Rembrandt, No 34, the house of M. Daurel!"

M. Chouinot trembled, but said nothing. There M. de Prejailles said to his companion as he opened the door:

"Monsieur, you may get out; the moment to execute your threat has arrived. Take my letters to M. Daurel!"

M. Chouinot sprang out. He could scarcely believe his ears. What was going to happen next!

At the door stood a servant dressed in black, with a white tie.

M. Chouinot went towards him.

"Monsieur Daurel?" he asked.

"What, monsieur!" said the servant, "have you not heard?"

"What?"

"Monsieur Daurel died this afternoon!"

M. Chouinot was fairly stunned.

"Oh!" he groaned, "I have no luck at all!"

He was about to walk away, when Henri de Prejailles stepped out of the carriage and held him back.

"You see," he said, "that good fortune does not always come to villains of your sort. You will now restore to me the letters you have stolen. We will go to your office to fetch them, and whatever you do, do not keep us waiting."

Poor M. Chouinot! What could he do? He went to his office with Henri de Prejailles at his heels; he took the letters out of a secret safe. M. Henri took them and placed them in his pocket.

"Now, M. Chouinot," he said, "I will tell you that M. Daurel never felt better in his life. He is alive and well. The servant at the door was my own valet. Twenty francs did the trick. You see the 20,000 francs you spoke of seems a pretty high price compared to that."

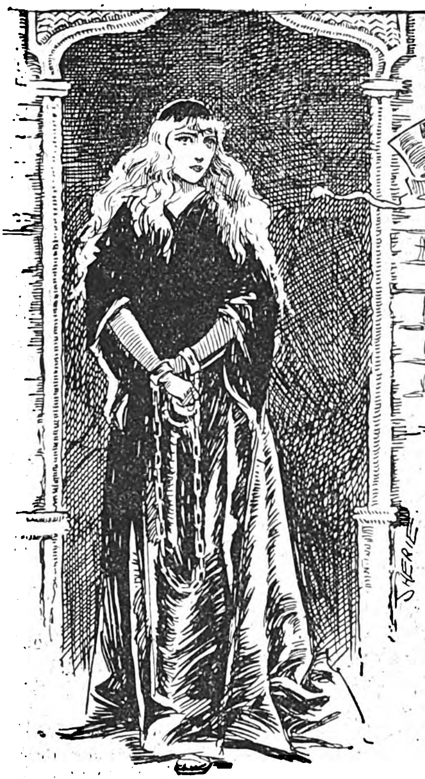
And as M. Chouinot raised his arms to heaven in utter despair, he added:

"For the rest, there is always a bullet in this plaything at your pleasure."

And he showed him his revolver.

E. C. Waggener.

THE WITCH OF SANTA BARBE.



There was a great stir in the tiny village of Santa Barbe. The hilly, picturesque streets were thronged with people decked out in gay attire, though it was not a holiday. In front of the old stone courthouse a mass of people surged, waiting—for what?

Within two weeks the town had become famous, not for its tobacco fields, not for its crops, not for any passing fair, but because Santa Barbe had lately acquired a new saint. Most of the villages possessed saints, but they were old, dried up, and buried centuries before, with the musty relics alone left for the people to worship and adore.

A passing report gathered weight as it spread all over Mexico, that here, in the miserable hamlet of Santa Barbe, a new saint was lying hidden, absolutely new—a girl, young, beautiful, and gifted with marvellous healing powers. The mere touch of her robe in passing was enough, the people said, to cure the vilest disease. In a few hours the people, barefooted and in tatters, were travelling towards Santa Barbe, bringing their sick with them as to a sacred shrine.

Crime and disease found their way hither. "Santa Teresa can take it all away," they said. The magistrates remonstrated: "The town is filled to overflowing. All the wretchedness and filth of Mexico is pouring into Santa Barbe. It must be checked." The decision was a wise one, but what power on earth could stay that rushing river? A quivering mass of humanity seethed outside the lowly hut which the little saint had chosen for her temporary dwelling on this earth. "Come, come!" the people cried. "She will not stay long with us, and when she flies away again to heaven we shall be left in our sins and misery."

Thus Santa Barbe had become world-renowned, even as far as the borders of Mexico stretched, east, west, north, and south. For the people that came sorrowful went away blessing the girl-saint. "It may be that the heart of the gracious Mother has been touched by the sufferings of her children," they murmured, "and she has sent her angel to comfort and heal us." But the magistrates cried out again: "Are the blessed bones of Santa Barbe to be thus mocked and set aside for the whim of a mad people? It must come to an end."

That night, while the people slept, the magistrates climbed the hill to the hut, and with their own hands dragged the girl to the courthouse, and locked her in a prison cell. The soldiers dared not touch her, so those in authority were compelled to perform the deed with their own bejewelled fingers. In the morning the fury of the populace knew no bounds. Their saint, their beautiful saint, has been rudely dealt with, and imprisoned in a cell like a common criminal. The wrath of Heaven must surely descend on Mexico for the rash deed.

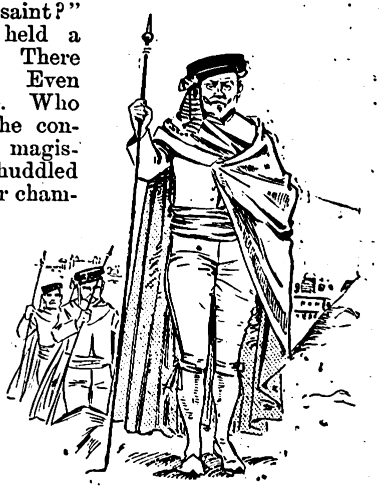
The people groaned, and then a few choice spirits bound themselves together, with an oath, to slay the rulers, and deliver the Madonna from her cruel imprisonment.

Oh, the terrible fear that hung over the town! Shops were closed, shutters pulled down, and the people assembled round the old, ivy-hung courthouse.

"Give Santa Teresa back to us," they cried. "Our children weep for her, and we cannot live without her. Where is she, our saint?"

The magistrates held a hurried consultation. There was great danger. Even now no life was safe. Who could answer for the consequences? So the magistrates, five in all, huddled together in the upper chamber, whispering, with their eyes on the windows, while the ceaseless roar of the waiting multitude sounded in their ears. Finally, one of their number rose; he was a tall, thick-set man, with crafty eyes and a Napoleonic jaw.

"Cowards, all of you," he said loudly, striking his closed fist on the table before him. "Think you those dogs would dare to rebel? I myself will speak to them. Watch, you shall see them cringe." He approached the window as he spoke



The magistrates climbed the hill to the hut.

and threw open the casement. A cry greeted him from without, at first faint, then growing mighty as the roar of an avalanche, and then dying away to a moan that was succeeded by a deathlike silence.

The magistrate stood there calm; that human storm was nothing to him, and at last his voice broke the stillness.

"Are you all fools, fools to be bewitched by this wretched creature? She is no saint, I know it, I can prove it. She is as you and I, mayhap worse. Nay, I say that she is a witch and is cheating you. For that reason we have brought her here—if she is innocent it will be proven."

"A witch, a witch! Santa Teresa a witch! Blasphemy! Down with him!" and the moan grew to a roar again.

"Listen to me—to me, Don Capello," he shouted, leaning far out so all could see him. "If she is a saint, can she not protect herself? If an angel, will she not use her wings?"

"Santa Teresa, where is she?" was the only reply.

In despair the Don leant still further out. "Your saint heals, yes; but how? Come forward and show me your closed wounds, then I will believe. Carlos, where is he; is his leg well?" The answer came up sadly, "He still limps." "And mother Manita, has her rheumatism gone?" The people gazed at one another in doubt. "Santa Teresa, the blessed saint!" they murmured, "bring her to us."

But the poison had done its work; the people were growing uneasy. "See, they cringe," he whispered to his brother magistrates; "now all is well."

"Hark;" he called aloud to the listening multitude, "she shall go back to her home, now, this afternoon, but first must come the trial. Are you content?" The silence was intense. "It is a good sign," he whispered again, and, closing the casement, he joined the relieved rulers.

They hastened down to the cell where the witch lay imprisoned, and, five against one, the trial went on inside, while without the crowd thronged under the windows like the quickening pulse of a fever patient. There was a hush of painful expectancy, and the air grew heavy and close, as one hour, two hours passed by.

A little apart from the throng stood a man, and of them all he pressed the nearest to the gate, as his eager, restless eyes flashed over the draping ivy and scanned each barred window. Instinctively the people followed his gaze.

"It is Sereno," they whispered. "He loves the Madonna well. It is said that before the wonderful power from above descended on her they were to have married. Now he loves her blindly. His hope is gone."

The rustle of a leaf in the trees, the twitter of a bird startled the watchers. Was it possible that Santa Teresa would use her wings and fly away from them? Suddenly the hush deepened. Every eye was riveted on the great oaken door. It moved on its hinges, and out of the darkness, like a ray of light, stepped a girl. The small, graceful form was draped in a long, black gown, clasped about the waist with a curious gem. It fell to the ground, showing beneath its folds a tiny foot, protected from the rough soil by the Mexican sandal. A face of piercing loveliness, encircled by soft golden curls, looked out from under a black cap, which fitted closely to the beautiful head. Her eyes shone like two stars, and the white face gleamed under the fair hair as the opal in her girdle. Such was the witch and the people's saint.

While she gazed on them the people shaded their eyes. It was pain to look on such a face.

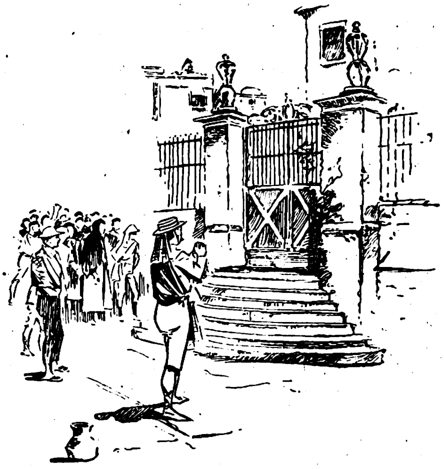
"Santa Teresa, Madonna," they whispered; "she has come back to us."

With a sudden cry Sereno flung himself on the ground.

"Holy Mother! They have put chains on her, the demons! The cruel links cut into her delicate flesh. See!" He shuddered as he lay.

The people fell back in alarm, and again the oaken door creaked, and the magistrates appeared before the multitude. Don Capello stepped forward.

"We have applied the test, my friends; it has failed." And with triumph he pointed to the slender arms weighed down by the heavy irons, and pointed with glee to the deep, cruel scars caused by some burning, fiery instrument of torture. "It is a witch—no saint!" he hissed.



A little apart from the throng stood a man.

With a groan the people looked on. A witch, their beautiful saint! How could it be? Did the Evil One look out of those beautiful, pitying eyes? Had the devil led those tiny hands in their labour of love? The Don went on in harsh tones addressing the people, while they, sobbing, gazed on the black-robed figure standing before them so silently awaiting its doom. "It is a witch, and must be removed from our midst."

As he spoke, the air grew heavier and closer, the black, threatening clouds seemed to droop as though they would swallow the courthouse, the judges, the prisoners, the people, in crushing embrace. A great fear passed over the crowd, and they trembled and almost ceased to breathe.

Only one, Santa Teresa, stood calmly, with unclouded brow, amidst the dreading multitude. She showed no fear, and ever and anon a smile played about the sensitive mouth, as though they were offering her some beautiful gift, instead of the cruel sentence of death.

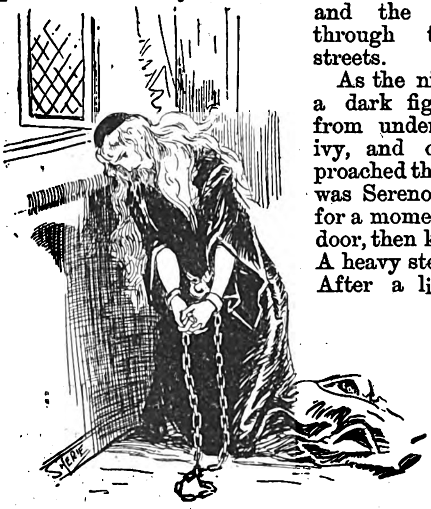
The magistrate hesitated, and then went on rapidly: "Teresa Coreno is condemned to be shot, and must die, as a witch in league with the Evil One, to-morrow at sundown." A violent crash of thunder filled the air as he finished speaking. "There is no more danger," he whispered to his associates, "the people are paralysed with fright, and will do as they are bid. The storm has helped us wonderfully," and he rubbed his hands together in triumph. "Teresa Coreno, you may now return to your home. I warn you to try no escape, nor attempt to influence the people in your favour, for you are watched; the least suspicion will throw you again into prison." The girl made no answer, but slowly descended the steps with her eyes on the ground.

Only as she reached the prostrate form of Sereno did she show any consciousness. With a pitying look she laid her hand on his head and murmured a few words of blessing. The crowd started back as she passed, and crouched with averted faces when her lustrous eyes rested for a few minutes upon them.

"A witch, a witch!" they muttered. "She has cheated us with her evil eye." Yes, the temper of the people had changed. They feared instead of loving her, and blind fury possessed them that this, their saint, had so deceived them. Still, they offered no violence.

With one accord they determined to watch the affair through to the end. If a saint, she must protect herself in her innocence, but if guilty, she must die the death of a witch; that was the decision. The magistrates could not have adopted wiser means to gain their ends than in thus committing her to the custody of the people. As their charge they would guard her carefully, lest she should escape and rob them of their spectacle; but had Santa Teresa been imprisoned from their sight they would have rescued her in anger and placed her on a pedestal for ever, as a martyr.

It was a clever ruse, and Don Capello laughed to himself as he watched the slender, girlish figure toiling up the hill to the hut, while the people hung back, dreading to encounter the evil eye. A few, a very few, still believed, and kissed the flowing hem of her gown as she passed, beseeching the blessing which she never refused to give, tenderly as a mother blesses her child. As the witch disappeared through the low doorway, another groan went up from the feverish moving sea, mingled with jeers and hisses. And then as the rain came down in torrents from the lowering clouds, they hurriedly dispersed. Presently not a soul was visible on the green, and the storm raged through the deserted streets.


Saw the witch kneeling beside the open window.

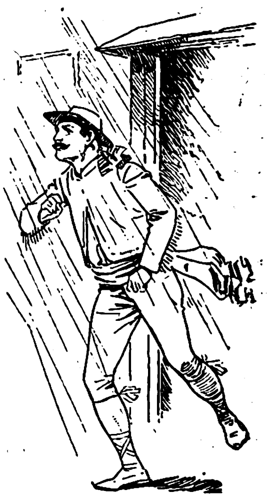
As the night deepened a dark figure stole out from under the draping ivy, and cautiously approached the tiny hut. It was Sereno. He listened for a moment outside the door, then knocked softly. A heavy step approached. After a little fumbling with the bolt, the door was unlatched, and an old man stood out on the threshold.

"Sereno, is it indeed you? I thought you had deserted with the other cowards."

"You know better," the other replied indignantly.

"Yes, you do well to reproach me," the old man retorted; "but you are not a father. I tell you my heart has ached with weeping so that all men appear as foes. It is the way of the world; but to think that those very ones whom my blessed child has healed and comforted should run away at the first shout. Yes, yes, I know you are impatient and did not come to see me," he went on as Sereno moved uneasily. "Go, I can bear it alone. She is there." And he pointed to a low door in the farthest corner of the long, dark room.

Sereno nodded. "Yes, I know."


He dashed out of the door.

The door was slightly ajar, and as he looked in he saw the witch kneeling beside the open window, while the evening wind played with the gold hair on that whitest of brows, and tossed its baby curls over her black cap. In vain she tried to raise her tiny hand to smooth those curls; the cruel chains weighed it down. With a half-sigh she clasped her hands together so that the rough iron links rattled, and pressed her lovely head against the wide window-bench.

"Holy Mother!" she murmured. "Why do they torment me so?"

Sereno stood at the door.

"Madonna!" he exclaimed. The girl raised herself and came forward.

"Sereno, why did you come? I can help you no longer. If it is a wound you must go to the doctor's; my power is gone. I believe the blessed Virgin has taken it away because the wicked men scoff."

With the cry of a hurt child, he fell at her feet. "Madonna, it is you," he gasped. "Did you not hear the sentence, do you not see the danger?"

"Is it the morrow you speak of?" she returned, laying her hand on his head as before. "Sereno, where is thy faith? Will not the Christ that died for us on the cross care for me, his suffering child?"

He caught the delicate wrist, loaded as it was with the chains, and kissed it passionately. "Teresa," he said, "he will help me to save thee."

The girl smiled, saying: "The people will not suffer it; I am no witch, and they know and love me too well to believe it."

"Oh, Madonna!" he cried, "how little you know the Mexicans; they are now as fierce against you as they before loved you. It is as good as a bull-fight, this spectacle to them. Do not trust them, but rely on me alone to save thee."

She would have spoken, but he went on rapidly: "Madonna, this night, while the storm and darkness last, I will bring the black stallion you love so well, outside the window. I will call softly like this: 'Madonna!' When you hear, you will come and mount, and we shall ride for our lives, away, far away, from this accursed Mexico."

Sereno was standing now. With all the pride and impulsiveness of early youth he spoke, but ever with that reverence which is born of love. He did not believe, had never believed, in that heavenly power with which she had been accredited by the ignorant populace. Three months before that day they had been betrothed—she merely a beautiful peasant, and he, Sereno, madly in love with her, and in all his hopelessness that love had never faltered.

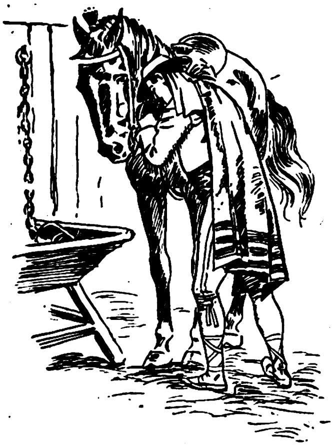
He remembered now how one evening she had sat on the doorstep, singing softly to the accompaniment of her mandolin. And he, leading a spirited black stallion, climbed the hill to her side, and going to her, had taken her in his arms, and placed the bridle in her tiny hand. "It is my betrothal gift," he had said, smiling at her delight.

Teresa, laying her beautiful head on the glossy, black mane, put both arms round the animal's neck and kissed him. "Be watchful, he is fierce," Sereno cried, warningly, but she had laughed at him, and even as he spoke the spirited creature stood at her side motionless under the caressing touch. She and she alone rode the stallion during the months that followed. Lucifer would suffer none but Santa Teresa and his master to touch him, and she loved him as a brother.

One night Teresa had a dream, and it was then the holy power descended on her. It was something she could not explain. "Sereno," she had said, as he pleaded with her not to leave him alone, "the gracious Mother has revealed herself to me and given me this power. I must go to the people and help them in their sufferings; do not touch me." Sereno wept like a child, but the girl was firm. In a week her fame had spread over Mexico. Teresa became a saint, the people's saint, whom they worshipped and adored. She, still simple as a child, healed the sick and thanked the mighty Father for her power. Sereno, of all the people did not believe. "His beautiful Teresa was no saint," he said firmly, and now he repeated it with a difference, "she is no witch, no witch."

Santa Teresa, half leaning against the rough stone, looked up at Sereno standing before her. There was pity in her glance, but no sign of wavering. "Madonna," he cried in his despair, "be not so wilful; they will shoot you—you, my bride. Come with me, oh, my love, and Lucifer shall carry us out of this fearful land. Speak, will you say yes? Lucifer shall carry us both."

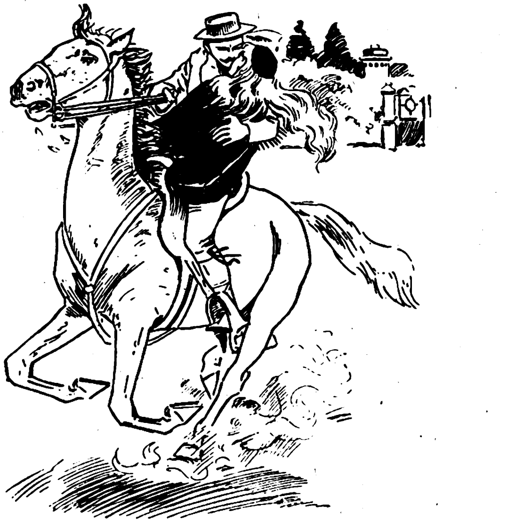
"Yes," she said, simply, "the fiend would bear us away, but while we stay, the Holy Mother will watch over us and keep us from evil." Even as she spoke, Teresa sank on her knees again before the open window, regardless of the lightning flashes, and, with her pale face bowed, moved her lips as in prayer. Sereno shivered as the heavy chains clashed. With one last burning look, he dashed out of the door, past the sleeping father, into the storm. As he did so, a shot rang out, for the house was watched. Sereno had forgotten the fact, though he remembered it now, with added pain, as the ball whistled harmlessly past his ear.



Laid his head on the arching neck.

It was not until the sun had risen high in the heavens that Sereno turned his footsteps homewards. It had been a night of suffering and long drawn out agony, spent in the lonely forest, amid the fiery sparkle of the lightning and the heavy thunder crashes. With indescribable weariness, he flung himself down on his hard couch and tried to sleep.

All that day the affairs of the village might have appeared to the eye of a stranger to go as usual, but Santa Barbe was not in its accustomed calm, and the air grew heavy with suppressed excitement.



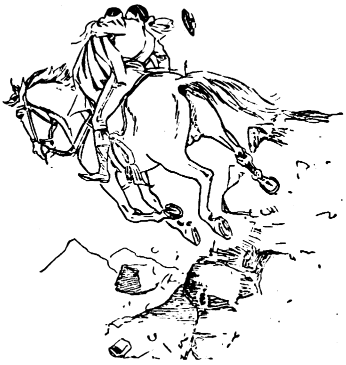
Pressed his passionate kisses on her white forehead.

Every eye was turned, as with common consent, towards the hut on the hill, guarded, as it was, by the bravest and strongest men of Santa Barbe; men who were not to be driven away by spirits, nor alarmed by the flutter of wings. So the day wore on, and as the hour of sundown approached, the shops were again closed, shutters pulled down, and the holiday gowns and coats brought out. Once more the people began to assemble on the open green, for it was a grim sort of festival to many. There was but one subject of conversation: How would their saint, or witch, as they now softly pronounced it, comport herself? Would she show fear, and die like any ordinary mortal? Would she ride away on a broomstick, with the fiends' imps around her, or, and this made them most to tremble, would the Holy Mother in anger send down an angel to carry her out of their sight? So they waited, pale with fright in anticipation, and feverish in waiting.

As the time drew near, Sereno sprang up from his couch. "It is the hour," he said shuddering, and went to the stable where Lucifer stood, saddled and waiting. The noble animal whinnied and stretched his eager nostrils as he saw his master approaching. Sereno took the bridle, and, with a groan, laid his head down on the arching neck which Teresa had kissed three months before.

"Madonna," he sobbed, "why has this thing come to pass?"

The horse trembled and moved uneasily as the hot tears bathed his mane. It was as if he understood, for his eyes shone full of fire and intelligence, and his nervous action seemed to condemn useless sorrow. Sereno raised his head, and now there was strength in his gaze, as he looked into the beautiful eyes of the stallion, kissed him on the forehead, and then sprang into the saddle.



Fell headlong over the edge.

With a sudden clang the great gate of the courthouse was flung open, and the five magistrates walked out in solemn procession, Don Capello at their head. As they took their places round the oak, the soldiers entered the hut and led out the one whom all eyes dreaded yet longed to see. Santa Teresa approached the oak rapidly, firmly. Her beautiful face, white as the driven snow, wore an expression of peace, as though she had already reached the gate of the Kingdom of Heaven. As they gazed on her unearthly beauty, the people wavered. Was it not, after all, a crime they were committing?

The voice of Don Capello reassured them.

"Be firm and courageous, ye people. When we hear the whirr of wings it is time enough to falter. Fear not, the witch must die as decreed."

A pitiful cry rose from amongst the multitude. It was the old man, her father. He was not to be quieted, so they led him, sobbing, away, at the command of the magistrates. His weeping only weakened the hearts of the people. Santa Teresa stood before the fatal oak, and Don Capello stepped forward and struck the chains from her wrists.

The soldiers raised their guns. The moment had come. Santa Teresa would soon be a saint in reality. Suddenly, there came a cry from the people. A black horse had bounded into their midst, and Santa Teresa, in an instant, was swept up into the saddle. The report of a dozen guns rang out on the silent air, but, with a mad spring into the air, the animal sped away. For one brief second the people were dazed, but Don Capello was the first to recover himself.

"Quick!" he cried, "out with the horses. She will escape while you fools sit there like so many stones. Put up the guns, we will seize her alive."

As he spoke, he caught his own horse, and climbing heavily into the saddle, started the chase. Before five minutes had come and gone he had hundreds at his back, for presently the entire village was mounted and in pursuit.

Lucifer was ahead, but could he keep there? for he was heavily laden with a double burden. Santa Teresa lay back in Sereno's arms. He feared she was unconscious, and in even that wild flight he clasped her closer and pressed his passionate kisses on her white forehead. In his impatience, each spring of the flying hoofs seemed but as the step of a lame man, and they could not go fast enough—yet Lucifer was straining every nerve, and great drops of blood and foam flecked his heaving sides.

Sereno glanced back in dread. Could they escape? If the pursuers numbered fewer it might have been, but there were hundreds of them—thousands, it seemed to Sereno's agonised gaze. Fierce, strong-limbed Mexicans, fearful when roused, and at their head the cruellest of mankind, Don Capello. Was he to be baffled? A smile of hatred lit up the latter's brutal features. "We are gaining!" he cried. "They cannot go on for ever."

But the danger lay not there. Lucifer flew straight as an arrow, with no thought of dropping until the goal was reached. Suddenly, to Sereno's horror, he found they were being gradually surrounded, for horsemen were everywhere, to the right, to the left, with Don Capello urging on behind. A steep hill loomed up ahead. With ever-increasing speed, Lucifer dashed up the slope. Through bushes, over stones, leaping gullies, onward and upward he fled surefooted, never stumbling nor wanting for breath. Sereno clung on in the muteness of despair, Santa Teresa folded in his fast embrace, her beautiful head resting on his breast. It was a ride to death.

A sharp precipice of several hundred feet lay directly in their path. Behind, on all sides came the people. The horse halted on its very brink, one foot hovering in mid-air, his hind hoofs striking wildly for a footing on the slippery rock. His eyes grew wide in agony, he snorted with a terrible fear and dread of what must come. Sereno glanced back once more. But there was the cruel face of Don Capello reared up like a serpent not ten paces behind.

He hesitated no longer. Santa Teresa opened her eyes. "Holy Mother," she murmured. Then he, with a mighty effort, lifted her in his arms, and leant forward with all his weight on the stallion's neck. The horse struggled, reared back in anguish, but it was too late. The rock crumbled beneath his clinging hoofs, and they fell headlong over the edge, down, down into eternity.

Sereno had at last received his bride. Death had united them for ever.

As the people crowded up the hillside, nothing was to be seen. With a cry of awe they lifted their eyes towards the blue sky, smiling over that scene of woe.

"Santa Teresa," they murmured. "It was the angel, and she has gone from us for ever, our beautiful saint."

Santa Barbe is famed no longer; it has almost been forgotten by the Mexicans themselves. The courthouse lies a mass of ruins, but beneath a mighty oak, gnarled, yet still green, stands a tiny chapel. The new generation, in passing, make the sign of the cross, while they murmur "Santa Teresa."

Frederick Heldon.

TWO GRAND NEW STORIES JUST ABOUT TO COMMENCE.

In the place of "The Treasures of the White God," previously announced,

GOLDEN STAR,

a romance by Mr. George Griffith, who wrote "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-born," etc.

WILL START NEXT WEEK.

Seven days later Mr. Headon Hill, the author of "Guilty Gold," opens a new novel to be called

THE QUEEN OF NIGHT.

Mr. Griffith being so well known to our readers needs no further introduction than the mere mention of his name, but Mr. Headon Hill is not so well known to them. He will soon, however, endear himself to everyone who is sensible enough to read Short Stories. It would be unfair to give the plot of his story, but this we do say—it is one of the most marvellous stories ever conceived by the mind of man, and will create a sensation.

THE STRANGE CASE OF SIR JOHN ROWELL.

THE mysterious Saint Cloud affair had excited and baffled all Paris for a whole month. M. Bermutier, preliminary judge, had been discussing the various aspects of the case before a group of friends.

"It is frightful," exclaimed one of the ladies, "almost supernatural! Nothing will ever be known."

"Yes, madam," said the magistrate, turning towards her, "probably nothing will ever be known. As for the word 'supernatural,' it has simply no place here. We have here a crime cleverly conceived, very cleverly executed, but so involved in mystery that we cannot disentangle it. Once before, however, I had to investigate a case in which there really seemed something fantastic, and which had finally to be abandoned unsolved."

"Oh, do tell us about it," cried several ladies with one voice.

M. Bermutier smiled gravely, as became a judge, and began: "I was preliminary judge at Ajaccio, and my chief duties were, of course, in connection with affairs of vendetta. One day I learnt that a little villa at the end of the gulf had been taken by an Englishman for several years. Everyone was speculating about this singular person, who stayed with a single man-servant, never leaving the house except to hunt or fish. He never spoke to anyone, and every morning he used to practise pistol-shooting.

"Rumour said he was some great personage who had left his country for political reasons. Then he was reported to be hiding, after having committed some terrible crime. I could learn nothing about him except that his name was Sir John Rowell. I had him closely watched, but nothing suspicious was ever reported to me.

"One evening, in passing, I observed him smoking in his garden, and saluted him. He invited me to enter and drink a glass of beer. I at once accepted. He received me most courteously, and we chatted pleasantly on many subjects. In reply to my questions on his mode of life, he told me that he had been a great hunter in Africa, the Indies, and America.

"'I have hunted man, too, a good deal,' he added. He then invited me in to see his collection of firearms. The salon was hung with black silk embroidered with gold. 'It is Japanese cloth,' he said.

"But a strange object in the centre of a large panel caught my eye. It was black, and stood out clearly on a square of red velvet. I approached. It was a hand—a man's hand, not a skeleton hand, white and clean, but a black shrivelled hand with yellow nails and muscles laid bare. The bones, which had been cut clean near the middle of the forearm, as if by a hatchet, showed dark stains as if of old blood. An enormous iron chain was welded round the wrist of this horrible member, fastening it to the wall, by a ring strong enough to hold an elephant.

"'Why!' I exclaimed, 'what is that?'

"'It is my greatest enemy,' the Englishman answered quietly. 'It came from America. It was severed by a sabre, skinned by a sharp flint, and dried in the sun for eight days.'

"I touched the human relic. It must have belonged to some giant. The fingers were excessively long, and were held by enormous tendons, to which pieces of skin still adhered in places.

"'This man must have been very strong,' I said.

"'Oh! yes,' he replied, 'but I was stronger. I have had the chain made to hold it.'

"'This chain is useless now,' I said, thinking he was joking; 'the hand can't run away.'

"'It always wants to get away, though,' Sir John Rowell answered gravely. 'The chain is necessary.'

"I thought he must be either a madman or a humbug, but his face remained as passive and impenetrable as ever before my searching look. I changed the subject, and began to admire his weapons. I observed three loaded revolvers lying at hand in the room, as if the man lived in constant fear of an attack. I returned to see him several times, and then my visits ceased. All had now become accustomed to him, and his presence had, therefore, become indifferent to all.

"A year passed. One morning my servant awakened me and announced that Sir John Rowell had been assassinated during the night. Half an hour later, I was in the Englishman's house along with the chief police authorities. The valet was standing distractedly before the door. At first I suspected this man, but he was entirely innocent. The body of Sir John was lying on its back in the middle of the salon. Everything showed that a terrible struggle had taken place. The victim had been strangled. His face was swollen and discoloured, and bore a look of deadly fear. He held something between his clenched teeth, and the neck, covered with blood, was pierced by five holes which seemed to have been made with some sharp iron points. A doctor arrived. After carefully examining the five strange impressions in the flesh, he said:

"'Why, it looks as if the man had been strangled by a skeleton.'

"I shuddered, and glanced at the spot where I had formerly seen the horrible dried hand. It was no longer there. The chain was hanging in its place, broken.

"I knelt over the body, and found between the clenched teeth a finger of the missing hand, cut, or rather gnawed off at the second joint, by the victim's teeth. We then made an investigation, but nothing was discovered. Neither doors, windows, nor furniture had been tampered with. The two watch-dogs had not even been aroused. Although a minute search was instituted throughout the whole island nothing was ever discovered.

"Well, one night, three months after the crime, I had a frightful nightmare. I saw the horrible hand running like a scorpion or a spider up and down my curtains and walls. The hideous member galloped round my room, using its fingers like claws. Next day the vile thing itself was actually brought to me. It had been found in the cemetery on Sir John Rowell's grave. The forefinger was missing.

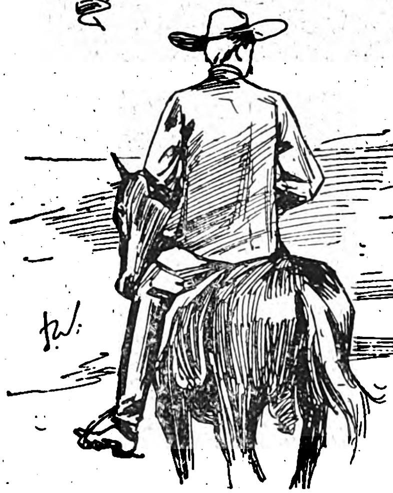
"This, ladies," said the judge, as he concluded, "is my story. I know nothing more."

* * * * *

"But that is neither *dénouement* nor explanation!" cried one of the terror-stricken ladies. "We shall not sleep to-night unless you tell us at least how you think it occurred."

"Oh, I think," said he, with a judicial smile, "simply that the legitimate owner of the hand was not dead, but that he came to fetch it with his remaining one. I never could tell, though, how he did it." N. N.

A DOWRY OF DIAMONDS



By Iza Duffus Hardy.

Author of "In the Springtime of Love," etc.

"It's a lonely-looking place," said Harry Osmond to himself, letting his horse fall into a walk as he drew near the house in search of which he had ridden out. "A lonely kind of place for her! I suppose this *is* the house. It can't be any other;" and he ran over in his mind the instructions he had received on leaving Orodelphia City—we should call it a village here, but a barn, a bar, and a general "store" make up a city in that far West wherein Harry Osmond had spent the best years of his life.

"Go straight on; leave Red Cross Cañon on your left; keep on till you come to Blue River Falls, then bear round to your right by the woods till you get out in the open valley, and there you'll see Kenrick's place right before you."

So this was "Kenrick's place," evidently—a small, bare barrack-like wooden house, suggesting a grotesque resemblance to a Noah's Ark, with all the paint worn off, set down in the middle of a strip of arid plain, its scant green burnt yellowish under the sun's merciless glare, walled in by dark, unbroken masses of the great redwoods on one side, by a jagged range of hills on the other. The general aspect of the house, and its position, produced an impression of forlornness and desolation in Harry Osmond's mind. He recalled the comments which his informant had added to the instructions in regard to the road.

"He's a queer sort, is old man Kenrick! They say he nearly blowed up Saucel City with his dratted experiments. We wouldn't have him here in Orodelphi', so he's built himself a place a few miles out. He comes in and out pretty often. There's some folks in the city won't send for no one but the old doctor when they're sick, but the gen'l opinion is that he's a mighty queer lot."

And Osmond was aware that a certain mild curiosity with which he, as a visitor to "old man Kenrick," felt himself being regarded, was mingled with a spirit of doubt as to the welcome he would receive at his journey's end—that complacent sort of doubt which was evidently satisfactory to those who had probably not been warmly welcomed at Kenrick's. The reflection of this doubt unconsciously entered into his own mind as he pulled up his horse at the door, and paused a moment before dismounting.

He saw no one at the windows; not even a dog barked, not a cow grazed near the house. While the horseman outside lingered and looked and thought what a lonely place it was for a girl, a girl gazing out of one of the windows, out of his sight at the other side of the house, was thinking much the same—not discontentedly; the cloud of discontent never marred the serene sweetness of Grace Kenrick's face, but with a faint stirring of vague longing that "was not akin to pain."

In the dead stillness of the hour and place she heard the trample of the horse's hoofs, the sound of someone stopping at the door, knocking on it with his knuckles, as there was no other means of gaining admittance. Dr. Kenrick had never thought it worth while to put up bell or knocker.

Grace went to the door and opened it. A tall, broad-shouldered young man stood there; bearded, sunburnt, with good-humoured dark eyes that lit up with a light of pleasure as they fell upon her face.

He looked at her for a minute without speaking, as if waiting for her recognition.

"You don't know me, then?" he said. "And if it was in the uttermost corner of the earth I'd have known you, Miss Grace, though you're changed somehow, yet still the same."

The girl did not find fault with his speech for its inconsistency.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a brilliant smile of surprise and pleasure. "How could I have forgotten you, even for a moment? But there is excuse for me—you are changed! I don't know how I know you!" she added laughingly.

"Does five years change a fellow as much as all that?" he rejoined a little deprecatingly. She had held out one hand, but he had taken both, and was holding them close in the familiar clasp of old acknowledged friendship.

"Is it only five years?" she said.

"Hardly more. I shouldn't think it *was* five years, looking at you."

And indeed Grace Kenrick at twenty was scarcely altered from what she had been at fifteen. A slender girl, with soft brown hair, and a delicate, pale complexion, with irregular, yet somehow attractive features—a gentle, serious, sometimes dreamy expression—her great beauty in the large, soft, grey eyes, with their limpid candour and almost child-like sweetness and innocence—she was, as a woman, just what she had been as a child, except for a trifle more maturity of form and feature, a shade of added thoughtfulness and gravity—a look almost too thoughtful for one still so young.

The years that had left her almost unchanged had developed Harry Osmond from a fair smooth-faced youth to a sun-bronzed man. He had filled out in figure, too, and was now a splendid young fellow, who looked handsome, strong, and manly, in his picturesque sombrero hat, his riding-coat, and his jack-boots.

Of course they soon came to the questions:

"How did you come here?" and "How has it been with you all this time?"

How Mr. Osmond came there was soon told. Since he had said good-bye to the Kenricks and started on a prospecting tour from Saucel City some five years before, he had spent his time in the mining district of the Black Hills; he had done fairly well there, was now on a holiday trip, had left his claim for a time in his partner's care, was on his way to San Francisco, and had made a *détour* chiefly for the purpose of visiting his old friends.

How things had been with Grace Kenrick all this time she also made short work in the telling. She was very well, and the Doctor, her father, was very well, and she liked this place well enough, though it had seemed a little quiet at first, after Saucel City. Father liked a quiet life for his experiments; he had a big laboratory at the back of the house; but on this subject she did not seem inclined to dilate. Osmond remembered that when he had left Saucel City, Dr. Kenrick, the leading doctor there, was enjoying a large and flourishing practice; he wondered how much truth there was in the gossip of Orodelphia, and whether the doctor's experiments made him indeed so undesirable a resident?

Presently Dr. Kenrick came in. He was a man of rather slightly-built, wiry figure, of average height; his face was old and wrinkled, the lower part hidden by a heavy, untrimmed, wild-looking beard. Hair and beard were so thickly streaked and patched with grey, fast turning to white, that scarce a vestige of their original colour was discernible; but the eyes were young still—large, clear, and bright, full of latent fire, wide with waking dreams—they looked out from under the grizzled brows in strange and almost startling contrast to the haggard, parchment-coloured face.

Grace went up to him with a happy, tender smile, and took his hand as she said:

"It is Harry Osmond, father! Would you have known him?"

The Doctor did not seem to take much interest in the question whether Harry Osmond was altered past recognition or not. He greeted him kindly and hospitably enough, with a cordiality that, although it was no more than lukewarm, clearly owed its moderation simply and only to the fact that his mind was too pre-occupied for him to spare much thought for the visitor.

Grace soon slipped away, on household cares intent. They kept no help—help in that country being hard to get and harder still to keep—so that Grace Kenrick's part in life was very far from being the ornamental alone. She bustled blithely in and out, getting the supper ready. Osmond jumped up to help her, and insisted on carrying the tray for her. One of the fruit dishes was broken, so Grace ran to the laboratory and came back with a cracked retort, into which she put the preserved peaches; this seemed to both the young people an excellent joke, although the Doctor, as soon as he realised the nature of it, started up in a hurry to assure himself that it was only a damaged and useless retort on which they had laid irreverent hands. The two young people laughed and chattered as they went to and fro between kitchen and parlour; the elder man looked on with a sort of mild awakening of interest in things around him.

Harry Osmond became a frequent visitor at the Kenricks'. He brought a new gladness into Grace's quiet life, a new sunshine into her smile. The Doctor was pleased to see his girl bright and happy. Grace was the apple of her father's eye; there was only one hope, one dream, that he held even dearer than his daughter. Yet somehow, until now that he saw the brightening effect of a little cheerful companionship—the healthy influence of another young, strong, vigorous personality upon her—he had never recognised that her quiet, lonely life of daily household work, pleasureless, friendless, needed some relaxation and recreation. It suited *him* so well, it had never occurred to him to doubt that it was equally well fitted for her.

Young Osmond's visits did not inconvenience *him* nor interfere with *his* way of life at all. If he were busy in his laboratory, Grace did not disturb him for Harry Osmond's coming and going; she made no stranger of this old familiar friend, who had been her childhood's companion. It was long since anyone had visited at the Kenricks' on such free and privileged terms, and the Doctor, somewhat to his own surprise, presently began to find that young Osmond's society was rather welcome to him than otherwise.

Osmond remembered some of the Doctor's theories, and certain allusions to the nature of his experiments, which had been dropped in the olden days. Little forgotten words and trifles floated up in his memory, and roused his curiosity in regard to Doctor Kenrick's present pursuits, although delicacy withheld him from

A girl gazing out of one of the windows.

making any observation to Grace, or inquiring of her concerning her father's occupations.

One day, however, the Doctor himself said to his daughter:

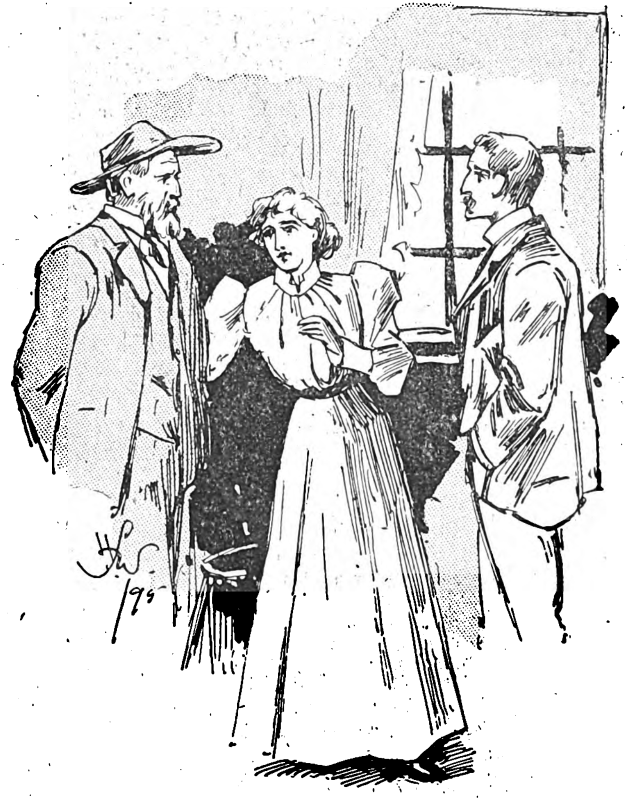
"Have you told young Osmond, Grace?"

"Told him what, father?"

"Our secret."

"No, father, I didn't know whether you would like him to know anything about it."

"He seems an intelligent young fellow," the doctor observed musingly, "and I should think he might be trusted. He is not one of the babbling sort, I fancy."



He was soon taken freely into the family confidence.

Grace placed her own interpretation on these remarks, and the next time Harry Osmond went through the usual form of duty inquiries about her father, she added to the usual answer, that he was busy in his laboratory, the observation:

"He is at a very interesting stage of his experiments just now," and Osmond was prompt to perceive by her manner, no longer restrained, as it had hitherto been, that she was ready and willing to enter upon the subject of those mysterious "experiments."

"I remember your father used to have a theory that certain secrets of the alchemists of old were not lost beyond discovery. They would be priceless secrets indeed if we could unravel them! If, instead of digging the gold out of the mines—which is pretty hard work I can tell you—we could learn the making of it!"

"My father thinks," said Grace, with a tender smile of hope and trust, "that the transmutation of gold is a hopeless dream! But there is something more precious than gold, the secret of the making of which might be learned. You know—we all know—that the diamond is only carbon in its purest form! My father has devoted years of his life to the study of this subject. He is steadily working out his theory; I think we are getting very near the light now!" and her soft eyes lit up with a beautiful confidence.

"I see, I see!" said Harry Osmond; and he did see, not only the father's dream, but the daughter's devoted faith.

When the ice had been once broken, and it was understood that Osmond was aware of the nature of the Doctor's pursuits, he was soon taken freely into the family confidence. Grace was glad to be able to talk to some sympathetic friend upon the subject which absorbed her father's very life, and held possession, though to a lesser extent, of hers. For long years past, while the external interests of everyday existence came and went, just skimming the surface, this secret pursuit had been the whole deep under-current of their lives.

It was an incalculable comfort to Grace to feel herself free to allude openly to what hitherto had been spoken of only between father and daughter, shut down in silence and reserve.

Even the Doctor, having once broken the seal of his secrecy, also found it a relief to talk to Harry Osmond about his life-long dream, which he confidently hoped soon to realise. No one knew of the real drift of his experiments except one or two men, who paid occasional long visits to the Kenricks' place, bringing with them mysterious and bulky parcels—who were assisting him in the construction of the needed apparatus, and who were sworn to secrecy; and even these had not been fully taken into his confidence. None, indeed, not even Grace, knew what were the ingredients by the employment of which he hoped to bring about the desired result. That was his great secret, religiously kept from even his daughter. Whatever these ingredients were, his idea was that their mixture in certain proportions and fusion under a powerful pressure would produce the crystallisation of carbon into its purest form—the diamond.

There were, he admitted, many difficulties in the way—one hitherto insurmountable difficulty had been the application of a compressive force of sufficient power—the construction of a machine strong enough to stand the shock.

But patient study and practical experiment had brought him now very near the goal. The hour of success was at hand—so he assured Harry Osmond. In his laboratory even now stood a great globe of solid iron, with a passage drilled through it to a circular chamber hollowed out in the centre.

This chamber was to be charged with certain materials, the composition of which was the great secret, and its contents fired by a powerful battery.

He had tried similiar experiments before, though hitherto with no other result than the shattering of the apparatus, and the smashing of windows in the neighbourhood—vigorous protests of indignant neighbours—and enforced retreat of the Doctor and his belongings to a more secluded locality.

But this time he believed he had insured against failure. The apparatus was the strongest that could be made; the time for the final trial was almost ripe—not quite—a few more final experiments had yet to be made—one or two possibly weak points to be guarded. And here a little difficulty occurred. To finally assure himself of the security of certain parts of the theory he had so long been working out needed expensive materials. And money was scarce at Kenricks'. Only Grace, always bravely and faithfully standing between her father and all domestic anxieties, from which her care could guard him, knew *how* scarce. She was up early and late, working hard to keep the household wheels running smoothly—doing all she could to save, but the poor girl could not coin money. The Doctor began to chafe at feeling himself delayed and hindered in his great work by what seemed to him so petty and paltry a thing as money, or the want of it.

"I have spent all my means and all the best years of my life," he said once, to Harry Osmond, in an unusual expansion of confidence. "The little fortune that should have been Grace's—her mother's dowry, which should have come to the child—all gone! The returns will be a thousandfold the cost—I should be a fool to grudge it—but straightened circumstances cause a little temporary annoyance and delay sometimes. My researches are expensive—they could not be carried on without diamonds. Diamond dust was the first thing necessary, and is the last—the last before the production of the perfect gem!"

It was on a Sunday, and Harry Osmond had done honour to the day and to the object of his visit by arraying himself in his best. He had bought his diamond studs and handsome solitaire ring with his own hard-earned dollars; he took a boyish pleasure in their sparkle; and he put them on to visit Grace simply because they were the best he had. He caught a yearning glance in Dr. Kenrick's eyes as they turned for a moment on these jewels—only for a moment, and then were hastily averted, as if the Doctor was fairly tearing that eager gaze away.

"Why, now—would *these* be any use to you?" said the young man cordially.

The Doctor's eyes glistened.

"No, no!" he said, drawing back. "They would save weeks of time and labour! They would turn probability into certainty, make assurance doubly sure. But I won't—no, no, I wouldn't rob you of them, Osmond, my dear boy! Likely you set store by those stones? They may have a value to you apart from their price, and any gems I have must be pounded—pulverised! For I must test the pure dust of the diamond yet once more."

"You're right welcome," rejoined Osmond, drawing the ring off his finger.

"You mean it?" said the Doctor, evidently resisting by sheer force the impulse to pounce on the jewel.

"With all my heart," the young man protested. "Why, what earthly good can these bits of trinkets be to *me*, compared to what they'll do if they can be the slightest help to you in your important experiments? See, now, here, take them all," and he loosened the studs.

And now the day drew near when the great trial was to be made. Before it came Harry made up his mind to speak to Grace. He told her, in the rough and broken phrases that are the eloquence of deep feeling, how dear she was to him, and that she would be even dearer still if, by any mischance, the experiment that was to crown her father's lifelong ambition resulted in failure.

He knew she could not leave her father while the great question was unsettled; he would never ask her to desert the old man, nor to fail in that daughterly devotion which was the first thing for which he had loved her; he only asked her to give him a grain of hope to live on—only wished her to know that he was hers, heart and soul, and hers only, for ever, whatever might be "the end of that day's business!" And, if all he had asked to make him happy was hope, he was more than happy when he pressed his first kiss on Grace's sweet lips, and knew that he had won the love that was his heart's desire.

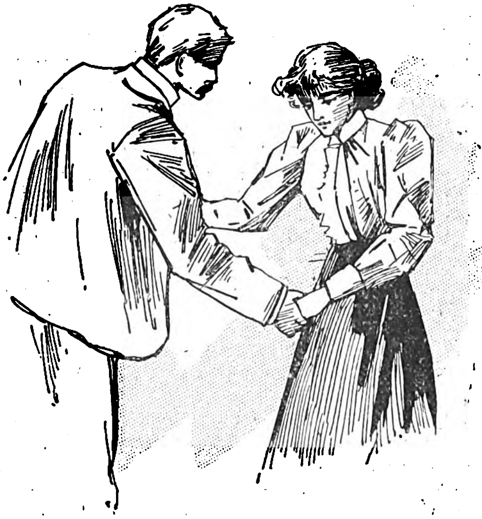
Of course, she could not enter into any thoughts of marriage in the present state of things. While her father's aim was unattained, the result of his long labours uncertain, her place was by his side. But now the crisis was near. If all went well, and the great object were successfully accomplished, then—then they might talk things over. And Osmond, having gained all, and more than all, that he had dared to hope for, was well content and light of heart when the day for the important ordeal came.

Two friends of the Doctor, who had assisted him in the construction of the apparatus, came to help in its transportation to a safe distance from the house. They conveyed it out by twilight to a lonely spot, secure from interruption.

The Doctor had charged the central chamber with the composition, of which the ingredients and their proportions and preparation constituted his great secret. This charge was to be fired and fused by means of a galvanic battery. They laid the connecting wires, and fixed the battery at what the Doctor deemed a prudent distance from the machine. They stood round the battery in the deepening dusk, a silent and anxious group of four men, and a woman—for Grace would not be left behind. Harry Osmond looked at her as she stood by her father's side, and even in the twilight he saw, if with his mind's eye rather than with his bodily sight, the loyal loving look on her pale face, the steadfast light in her shining eyes. He took a step that brought him between her and the machine, to shield her, so far as he could, in case of any accident.

The Doctor touched the handle of the battery.

There was a crash and a blinding cloud of dust. For a moment the watchers caught their breath, and, with one impulse, drew closer together. Then the Doctor, shaking himself free from Grace's clinging hold, seized the lantern, and rushed forward. The iron globe had



He told her how dear she was to him.

burst, and lay in pieces. He knelt down to examine the fragments, and the rays of the light wavered and flickered as the hand that held the lantern shook. Osmond, the first to follow him, took the lantern from his trembling fingers, and stooped to help in the examination. The others joined, and all eagerly inspected and searched among the scattered fragments of the broken machine.

Not a word was spoken until Grace at last whispered, softly touching Harry's arm:

"Is there—is there—any sign of success?"

He looked round at her and hesitated, in anxious silence, for a moment or two; then, as no one else answered, he said reluctantly:

"I am afraid—there—there doesn't seem to be any—any result."

But the Doctor knelt and patiently and persistently sought amongst the shattered pieces still.

"Father, dear," Grace presently whispered tenderly, "hadn't we better be going home?"

"I must look by daylight," he said, taking no notice of her words. "It's impossible to make a full search by this light. I must wait till daylight."

"Yes," said Osmond, "we'll come back early in the morning."

"Come back?" the Doctor repeated. "I shall not stir from this place! Leave it—here—now—all night? No; I wait here. You can all go home. I stay where I am."

Grace laid her fingers lightly on her father's shoulder, and gently but firmly took the matter into her own hands.

"I will go home and fetch some blankets and things, and come back here and camp out with father," she said.

And so it was decided; it seemed, indeed, the best way. It was a fine night—a clear, dry, and dewless Californian night; and although Harry did not at all like the idea of Grace "roughing it" and camping out, he still could not but admit that it would probably do her no harm. The other men proposed division of forces, one of them remaining with the Doctor, the other accompanying Grace and Osmond to the house to fetch wraps, coverings, and comforts for the night; but finally the whole quartette set off on this errand, the Doctor protesting he would rather be left alone awhile, and Osmond being strongly of the mind that four are much better company than three.

He walked with Grace, and did his best to cheer her with the idea that failure might be only a temporary postponement of the attainment of the longed-for end. They returned laden with materials for rigging up a sort of tent for Grace, and plenty of wraps for her father. Harry Osmond said that he too would camp out that night; the other two men, having given their assistance in the arrangements, decided to go home to their hotel; they possibly thought the daylight investigation was not worth waiting for. With Western taciturnity and good-feeling they did not say much, but bade the Doctor "keep up his spirits," for "he'd do it yet—maybe!" added the less sanguine of the two.

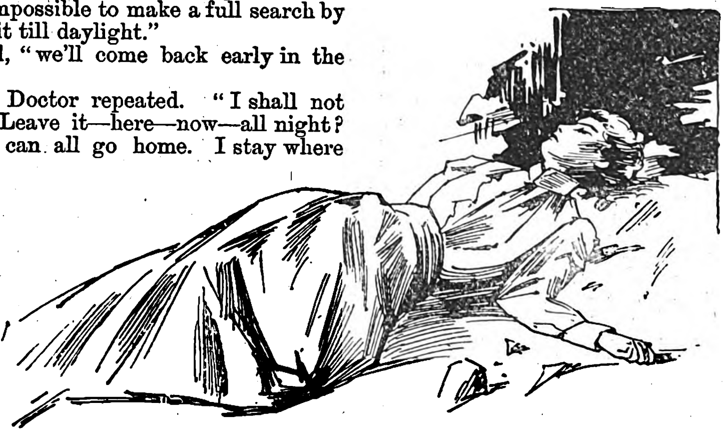
The level rays of the morning sun were streaming broad and bright across the valley, and Harry Osmond, rolled up in his Mexican blanket, was sleeping soundly still. In his dreams he heard the name so often in his mind, of which his heart was so full that it seemed only natural it should echo in his sleep! But the sound grew louder—the call pierced through the shadows of dreamland.

"Grace! child! wake up! Grace—Osmond—look here! *look here!*"

"Eh—what? What's up?" exclaimed Harry starting, and scrambling out of his blanket.

The Doctor's worn face was flushed and transfigured with a look of wild hope and trembling joy; his eyes shone with a strange light, as if his whole being were strained to the very verge of sanity. In the palm of his quivering hand he held out to show them a pinch of sparkling dust.

Grace and Harry hastened to inspect the glistening atoms. Somehow they carefully avoided looking in each other's eyes. That tiny pinch of shining dust—was it in very truth real diamond dust?



But Grace would never open her eyes.

Grace strove to convince herself that she had no doubt. She could not dash her father's joy by a question of it. He knew best. She soon persuaded herself to share his confidence. He harped exultantly on the theme all the way home. The experiment had been no failure. Here, in these few grains of glittering dust, was the successful result! The only drawback was that the result was small—certainly very small. This was the pure material of the diamond—only there was so very little of it! A little more care, a little harder study, a little change in the conditions, a stronger machine—so strong as to stand the shock without bursting and thus diffusing the force, and next time they would see the success of which these atoms gave the sure and certain promise!

He was so confident that Harry Osmond, who had at first looked doubtfully at the little pinch of precious dust, began to be persuaded—or at least in his heart regarded it as an open question. It might indeed be as the Doctor declared it was. On the other hand, Osmond could not entirely exclude from his mind a suspicion that it might be only a fragment of felspar—some grain of crystal or quartz pulverised by the shock.

After this eventful night the Doctor resumed his studies and experiments with renewed energy. With wild and feverish eagerness he devoted himself to the pursuit of that long-sought object on which it seemed to him now that his hand was at last about to close.

The difficulty of constructing an apparatus of sufficient strength to stand the shock that his trusted globe of iron had proved incapable of bearing, exercised the Doctor's mind, and presently formed a plan. Some distance down the valley, near the opening of a wide gully leading back into the hills, a most lonely and deserted spot, was a stretch of barren stony land, strewn with great rocks and boulders. On these the Doctor cast his eye. The loneliness of the situation attracted him.

He proposed to utilise one of the largest boulders for his purpose. A hole was to be drilled deep into the heart of the solid rock, into this molten iron was to be poured; then through the cooled iron a passage was to be bored, and the chamber to hold the secret composition scooped out in the centre. Finally, the rock itself was to be bound round with broad and massive clamps of iron. By means of this device he was convinced he could employ a battery of even greater power than before, without risk of the bursting to pieces of the apparatus.

Time slipped away, and the long-anticipated day of the great trial came at last.

"You're pale, my darling," said Harry Osmond tenderly, to his betrothed. "Don't fret yourself with anxiety! Nothing's worth fretting your sweet self about! Success means fame and fortune; but *we* have what is dearer than fame—and more than all the money in the world could buy for us!"

"It is not money—no, nor fame! that *I* care for," murmured Grace; "it is that my father's very life is bound up in this!"

"It will all go well, dearest. You'll see it will be all right," he answered soothingly, anxious to reassure her, although he felt in his heart that he was not so very sure himself.

And now the hour had come!

This time it was broad daylight. Dr. Kenrick, taking warning from his experiences on the occasion of the former trial, had resolved not to trust again to lantern light for the important examination of the results.

Dead silence had fallen upon all the group.

They glanced from the great rock to the battery with its motionless wires, from the battery to the lever-handle in the doctor's hands.

A moment, and he grasped and pressed it.

There was a deafening, rending crash, that shook the solid earth beneath their feet and darkened the sky above their heads. Not a man kept footing or breath or sense in the terrific concussion. Riven rock and shattered iron flew high and wide. Far off, birds fell dead from the shock, and the alarmed neighbours from many a mile round started for the scene of disaster.

But long before the nearest neighbour on the fleetest horse could reach the spot the stunned and bruised members of the company of fortune-seekers had picked themselves up from the ground—all but one!—and the worst was known.

Harry Osmond, for a few moments stunned and dazed, but otherwise uninjured, sat up and looked round for Grace. Side by side, as they had stood, father and daughter had fallen, and both lay motionless. Harry staggered over to them, and fell on his knees by Grace.

In a minute or two the Doctor also moved, sighed, raised himself on his elbow, and when the mists had cleared from his dazed eyes, and he looked at the little group beside him, he dragged himself up and bent over his daughter.

"Grace, why Gracie!" he said hoarsely. "She's fainted, the poor child! Come, Gracie, rouse up, my girl! Speak to me! Why do you look like that, Harry? She's only fainted—girls often faint! why even I—I—was a little faint and giddy myself! Come, Gracie, my brave girl, rouse up! Open your eyes and speak to your old father!"

But Grace would never open her eyes and speak to him, nor to any other any more in this world. A large splinter of iron had struck her on the head. Life pulsated feebly on at her heart for awhile, a little while; but she never gave word, or look, or sign of consciousness again.

* * * * *

A few days after the tragic event of this too-memorable night, one of the leading jewellers in San Francisco was called into the parlour behind his "store" to see a gentleman who wished to speak to him on particular business. The visitor, an old man with white hair and beard, and bright, restless eyes, looked haggard, untidy, dusty, and travel-worn, but his manner was unmistakeably that of a gentleman, as he informed the jeweller that the business on which he had called was disposal of some splendid diamonds.

"It is a rare chance I have to offer you," he said, fumbling in his breast and producing a little wash-leather bag. "They are perfect stones, of the purest water. I think you'll say you have never seen finer diamonds. I have only brought a few for your inspection; but there are more where these came from! I would not part with them, but they are my daughter's dowry; I want to turn them into hard cash for her. My intention," he continued, untying the knotted string of the little bag with eager fingers, "is to keep a few of the very finest stones to be set for her as a bridal present to wear on her wedding-day, and turn all the rest into hard dollars for her dowry."

The jeweller nodded, not unsympathetically.

"Well, let us look at them," he said.

The old man carefully poured the contents of his bag upon the table.

The jeweller frowned impatiently, with disgusted surprise. He did not mind a good joke, but this was an excessively poor one—the poorest of practical jokes, to befool him into listening to a tale of diamonds, and then turn out some broken bits of a common glass bottle! A few splinters of a smashed bottle—a paltry, shabby jest indeed!

He was pushing the glittering fragments away roughly, with an angry look of contempt, when he noticed the fond and almost ecstatic look the visitor bent on his bits of bottle-glass, the earnest, exultant, agitated tone in which he was dilating on the perfection of these priceless and flawless gems.

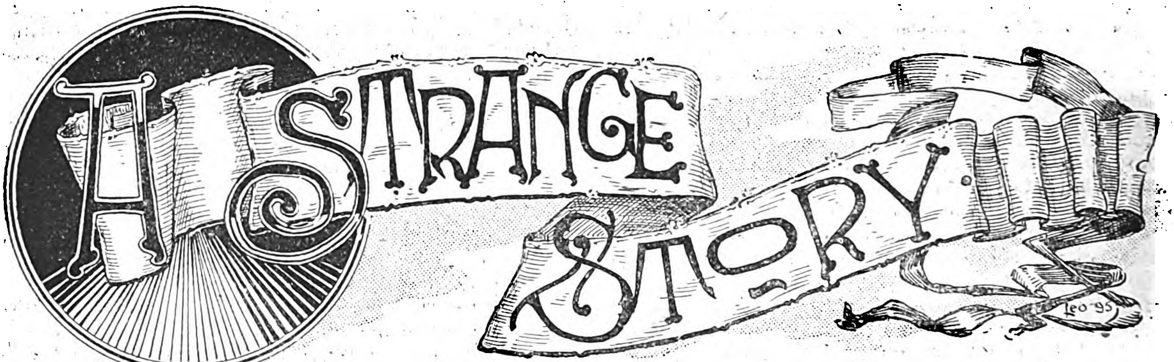
The jeweller's frown softened into a expression of pitying comprehension. He saw now that this was no jest.

When Harry Osmond, who had followed fast upon the Doctor's track, traced him that evening, he found him in a small room at one of the best hotels, counting over his treasures.

"I wish Gracie would come," he said. "I feel to-night that I'm old, and lonely and ailing. People are very kind—but it's my own flesh and blood I want now. Seems to me that Grace is a long time. I hope she will come soon, and I'll go home with her."

"It won't be very long, I think, before Grace is with you again," Harry replied, with a quiver in his voice. "And meanwhile, you'll let me stay with you, and I'll look after you and try to be all a son could be to you, until—until Grace comes to fetch you home."

It was a long time that the broken old man lingered, helpless and harmless, bereft of reason and strength, in a world wherein he had no longer part nor place; but Harry Osmond kept his word and devoted himself to the care of this poor wreck of life until the summons came that re-united father and daughter, and Dr. Kenrick's great secret died with him.



A STRANGE STORY

THE inhabitants of the usually sleepy little town of Eminster had for once in a way thrown aside their habitual apathy, and the veriest stranger would have said at once—and he would have been right, too—that something unusual was about to take place.

The annual assizes were being held, and although the calendar of crime was not a heavy one, it comprised one case that had for weeks past excited the greatest interest in the town and neighbourhood; and it was now about to culminate in the prisoner being put upon his trial, charged with the murder of a man, name unknown.

Gathered about at street corners were little groups of men, all eagerly discussing the coming trial; in respect to the prisoner's guilt or evidence there was a decided divergence of opinion.

"You see, the body ain't been found, that's one thing in his favour."

"Yes, but his hat have; there's no getting away from that."

"Then there's the blood on the——"

"Yes, but there weren't none found on his hands, or his clothes, was there now? Answer me that."

"Well, seeing as how he most likely carried him head downwards, as being most easy-like—the same as I was a showing you the other night, you know, with my boy Willum—it ain't to be expected as he'd have any blood about him. No! no! he was too artful for that; it's my belief he'll hang anyway."

"Hallo! here he comes."

A closed conveyance came up the street, driven at a rapid pace by a policeman out of uniform, but, nevertheless, a constable all over. A uniformed officer sat by his side on the box, and inside, as the vehicle passed rapidly by, could be seen two other men in blue and the prisoner.

There was a rush towards the Town Hall to get a view of the latter; but his custodians took the precaution of going into the yard at the back, and the curiosity of the onlookers was defeated.

Inside the precincts of the court every inch of space was occupied by an eager and excited body of spectators, and there was the usual hum of murmured conversation, until the usher shouted: "Silence, silence in the court," and the judge entered and took his seat.

The twelve good men and true composing the jury were immediately sworn, and filed into the jury-box, and then every eye in court was turned towards the door through which it was known the prisoner would make his appearance.

First a warder, and then a smart, well-set-up, muscular young fellow, aged apparently two or three-and-twenty, with a somewhat foreign class of features, a profusion of black curly hair, and a dejected look upon his face that denoted how the several weeks' confinement he had already undergone had told upon him—needless to say, this was the prisoner, Martin Smith.

When he had taken up his position in the dock after taking one swift look round the court, and apparently failing to recognise anyone present, he looked earnestly at the jury, as if to try and discover what manner of men they were in whose hands his fate was so soon to be placed.

To the usual question: "Guilty or not guilty?" he responded in a distinct tone: "Not guilty, my lord."

There was a rustle of expectancy as the counsel for the prosecution rose in his place.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the Jury, the case I have to lay before you is one of extreme mystery, and the only evidence I am prepared to offer will be almost, although not entirely, circumstantial. It will be proved that on the 20th June last, the prisoner came to the neighbouring town of Lymeton by rail, and that he travelled by the hotel bus from the station to the "Golden Cross," being the only passenger. Arrived there he inquired if he could have a bed for the night, and a room was assigned to him. He partook of some refreshment in the coffee room, and, having done so, wrote two or three letters which he himself went to post, having asked in what direction the post office lay. The recipients of these letters have not been traced, and the incident has therefore no further bearing upon the case.

"On his return, after an absence of less than a quarter of an hour, the hotel bus, conveying passengers from the last down train of the day, had just deposited a passenger who also desired to put up for the night, remarking that his luggage had been taken on in the train by mistake; but he was informed every room was full, the boots turning to the prisoner, remarking: 'This gentleman has just taken the last.' Whereupon the now missing man seemed much put out, saying it was most annoying, as he had a special appointment to keep in the neighbourhood the next day.

"The prisoner, you will be told, voluntarily offered to share his room with the stranger, an offer the latter very willingly accepted, and in a short time the two men were engaged in friendly chat in the smoking-room. Later on the conversation drifted into politics, and the arguments became warm on both sides, so much so that the attention of the waiter was attracted thereby. The prisoner, it appears, was advocating physical force for the remedy of constitutional grievances, whereas the stranger expressed himself as strongly opposed to such proceedings.

"Eventually, about eleven o'clock, both men retired to rest, the prisoner instructing the chambermaid to bring him some hot water, as he always shaved over-night. To do so necessitated her going to the lower part of the house, and she will tell you that on her return to the bedroom she heard an angry altercation going on between the two men, which, however, ceased when she knocked at the door, and she was unable to hear the purport of their remarks. But on the door being opened for her to place the water inside, she noticed that the prisoner seemed, as she expresses herself, much put out.

"Gentlemen, what subsequently took place I am unable to tell you, but the next morning the prisoner came down to breakfast at nine a.m., and remarked casually, that his bedfellow was up before him, and he supposed he had gone out to keep an appointment. As events proved, gentlemen, that appointment was never kept. There was, however, nothing to arouse suspicion beyond the fact that the stranger did not put in an appearance, but it seems that the chambermaid, when making up the bed, noticed what appeared to be blood stains on the carpet—(sensation in court)—and lost no time in communicating the fact to the landlord of the hotel, who himself visited the room and found not only that the girl's statement was true, but that on some steps leading from the verandah outside the bedroom down to the garden below (a plan of the house and grounds will be submitted to you) there were unmistakable signs of what appeared to be blood. There was also a small pool of blood just by the footbridge spanning the river, which, as you are doubtless aware, is a swift tidal tributary running into the sea, less than a mile distant.

"This is as far as I can carry the case, no trace of the missing man having since been found, although a few hundred yards below the bridge, at low water the same day, was found a hat, bearing no maker's name or other means of identification, but corresponding in appearance with the one worn by the missing man on his arrival at the hotel the night before.

"These are the facts, gentlemen, as I am instructed, and you will not be surprised to hear that on their coming to light the prisoner before you was arrested, charged before the local magistrates, and by them committed for trial. It is but fair to the prisoner to say that on the morning of the discovery he made no effort to leave the hotel, but busied himself in writing an essay, apparently for publication, on the gross injustice under which certain of Her Majesty's subjects suffer, and I shall not be exceeding, I think, the bounds of fairness and justice when I say that, from papers found in his possession when searched, he would appear to be a member of at least one revolutionary society.

"Beyond his name, the correctness of which is borne out by its being written on several articles of wearing apparel, it has been impossible to discover anything as to his identity, although, from the fact of his being defended by one of the most able advocates of the English Bar" (the defending counsel acknowledged the compliment by bowing), "it is, I think, pretty evident that he is not friendless or penniless. Gentlemen, that is the case before you. I will now proceed to call witnesses in support of what I have stated."

The first witness called was the driver of the bus, who deposed to having driven the prisoner from the station to the hotel, and subsequently, the missing man, who came in by the last train; his evidence was purely formal; and the prisoner's counsel did not make any cross-examination.

The same thing occurred with the boots of the hotel, and the coffee-room waiter; whose evidence was nothing beyond a bare statement of facts.

A chambermaid next entered the witness-box; and after detailing how she had been instructed to carry hot water to the bedroom, described how she heard the voices of the two men engaged in angry altercation, the sound of which ceased when she knocked at the door.

In cross-examination she admitted that she could not be sure it was an *angry* argument, as she could not distinguish anything that was said.

"Might they not have been laughing uproariously at some joke?"

They might, for all she knew; she heard a good deal of noisy talk.

"I thought you said, just now, 'angry talk? Be careful what you say; mind, you are on your oath."

"I couldn't swear they were what you might call quarreling, but they were talking loud."

"You did not happen to hear anything they said, I think?"

"No, sir, I did not."

"Thank you, that will do," with a significant glance at the jury.

Several other witnesses followed, their evidence merely referring to the prisoner's movements on the night of arrival and the morning of the supposed murder; and then there was a visible excitement in court as the chief witness in the case, the chambermaid who made the discovery of the blood on the carpet, took her place and was sworn.

"Your name is Esther Gough?"

"Yes, sir."

"And on the 21st June last you were engaged in making up the bed and tidying up the apartment known as the balcony room at the Golden Cross, Lymeton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, look at the jury, please, and tell us what you saw."

"I had nearly done the room, when at the side of the bed next to the window I noticed a dark stain on the carpet, and when I went to wipe it up with my cloth it was wet, and I found it was blood" (sensation), "and I at once went and told the master."

"That is all you know about it?"

"Yes, sir."

Cross-examined: "In the bedroom was a table with writing materials, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ink and papers, etc.?"

"Yes, sir; it is a rule of the house."

"Quite so. Black ink, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"And red?"

"Yes, sir; all the inkstands are the same pattern, with two bottles—one for black ink, the other red."

"And it would be your duty to see they are supplied with ink regularly?"

"Yes, sir."

The defending counsel sat down.

James Goold, landlord of the hotel, deposed to being informed by the last witness of there being a stain of what appeared to be blood on the carpet in the balcony room, and went to see for himself. There was a small stain, and he certainly thought it looked like blood. He opened the window leading to the verandah and steps, and went down into the garden, and in doing so he noticed on the steps and along the gravel path what he took to be more blood marks; and, pursuing his investigation until he came to the bridge over the river, he found a pool of blood just by the edge of the water. He had not at the time been apprised that the second gentleman, who had occupied the balcony room, had not been seen; but, on hearing of this, his suspicions were aroused, and he gave notice of the matter to the police. Having done so he felt his responsibility was at an end.

Cross-examined: "He was out at the time the missing man arrived."

"Beneath the verandah there is, I believe, a fowl run?"

"There is."

"And you keep fowls there?"

"I do."

"And when any are killed it would, I suppose, be convenient to hang them by the legs on the railing of the iron staircase?"

"I have seen my man do it."

"Are all the fowls thus killed consumed in the house?"

"Most of them; not all."

"And what becomes of the others?"

"I sell them."

"And—now pay attention, please—in the event of any fowls being killed for sale, where would they be taken? Up the steps and into the house through the bedroom?"

"No; they would in all probability be handed to a higgler, who calls in his boat once or twice a week."

"And he would come to the landing-place by the bridge, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

A murmur of applause ran through the court as counsel resumed his seat.

The only other important witness called for the prosecution was the man who at low water found a hat in the mud near the bridge.

Several witnesses were then called to prove that it was similar in shape and colour to the one worn by the missing man on his arrival, and this closed the case for the prosecution.

The prisoner elected to be sworn, and his counsel proceeded to examine him, by asking if he had ever seen the missing man before June 20th; to which he replied he had not. On being asked as to what was the nature of the conversation between them in the bedroom, the prisoner entered into a tirade against the inequality existing between the rich and poor in this country, and boldly announced himself as a revolutionary Anarchist; in vain did his counsel try and intervene, to prevent him giving expression to sentiments, which it was plain to see—by watching the faces of the jury—were speedily alienating any sympathy he might have aroused in their minds. It was a useless effort, as having once begun, he continued in a strain of almost ferocious invective, and it was not until he had well-nigh exhausted himself by the vehemence of his utterances that he seemed to realise the injury he had done his case. But he finished his harangue, and then looked defiantly at judge and jury, as if he would say: "Those are my sentiments, my lord and gentlemen, and I glory in them."

After putting one or two more or less irrelevan questions, his counsel resumed his seat.

Knowing the ability of the prosecuting counsel, it was anticipated that the cross-examination would be a severe one, but to the surprise of everyone in court, addressing his lordship, he said, in a tone of voice, the significance of which made itself felt:

"My lord, after what the prisoner has himself said, I do not think there is any necessity for me to cross-examine him, and I will, with your lordship's permission, proceed to address the jury, a task which will not occupy me long.

"My Lord, and Gentlemen of the Jury, you have heard the evidence brought before you, and despite the prisoner's rash utterances"—the prisoner's face never relaxed a muscle at this pertinent observation; he appeared, in fact, to regard the whole matter more in the light of a disinterested spectator than anything else—"despite, I say, the prisoner's vehement declarations, amongst which was the statement that under certain circumstances the taking of human life might be regarded as justifiable; despite all this, I say, which may, I think, be regarded more as the outcome of the pernicious doctrines of certain fanatical revolutionists of this age than any actual belief he himself holds, I would ask you to view calmly and dispassionately the evidence which has been laid before you.

"That a man—name unknown—did on the night of the 20th June occupy a bedroom conjointly with the prisoner has not been attempted to be disproved. And the fact that since the two men retired to rest one of them has not been seen alive, or heard of, is also undisputed. Beyond this I admit the case entirely rests upon circumstantial evidence, with this important addition that blood was found upon the carpet, on the verandah steps, on the gravel, and, finally, by the side of the river, in which, as you have been told, the tide flows very quickly, quickly enough, gentlemen, to carry away with it the body of a man. And last of all there is the finding of a hat similar in shape and appearance to that worn by the missing man.

"These are the facts, gentlemen, on which you are asked to arrive at a verdict, and I cannot doubt in my own mind what it will be. It is not for me to foreshadow the line of defence, but I may perhaps be allowed to suggest that the absence of any weapon will be dwelt on by my learned friend; this I may discuss at once, as I venture to submit that strangulation would not have been difficult to accomplish for a man of the prisoner's build, bearing in mind that the missing man has been described to you as of slim stature, and below the average height; no match, in fact, in a physical encounter for the man before you; and the fact of only a small quantity of blood having been found would support this view, it being well known that in cases of death by strangulation or hanging, only a small quantity of blood is as a rule discharged through the nose or ears of the victim; not having inflicted any wound, the prisoner may have imagined to himself that no trace would remain of his crime. Whilst on this subject, I may remind you that the prisoner's counsel ingeniously suggested that the blood stains might have been those of a slaughtered fowl!

"Gentlemen, you will have observed this point was merely suggested, not pressed home. Had it been," in an impressive tone of voice, "I was prepared to call two medical men who would have sworn that they had severally, and independently of each other, analysed the red substance which had become congealed on one of the iron steps of the staircase and found it to be human blood!" (Sensation.) "This, I think, gentlemen, satisfactorily disposes of the suggested theory. Had it been more than a suggestion I should have been prepared to refute it, but as it was I did not deem it necessary to unduly occupy the time of the court.

"Gentlemen, as counsel for the prosecution, I have tried to do my duty, it is for you, and you alone, to decide what the verdict shall be, and I leave the issue of the case unreservedly in your hands."

There was a death-like silence in court, and every eye was directed towards the prisoner, who had listened unmoved to the terrible indictment preferred against him with all the force and ability of one of the most skilful lawyers of the day, the prosecutor for the Crown.

To say that the prisoner looked altogether unmoved was perhaps to understate the fact. The look of anxiety which his face had worn at the commencement of the proceedings had been replaced by one of stolid indifference, and his counsel scanned his features carefully before rising to reply.

To everybody's surprise his opening sentence was as follows:

"After what has fallen from the lips of my learned friend—and there was nothing in his speech to which I take exception—it is, I feel, useless for me to attempt to put forward any ordinary line of defence. But, gentlemen of the jury, I would ask you to look for a moment at the prisoner." (The jury, to a man, instinctively looked in the direction of the dock.) "But a short while ago, gentlemen, you heard the prisoner declaim against the existing conditions of society, and even go so far as to say that, under certain circumstances, the taking of human life was a justifiable act. Placed in the awful position the prisoner is, I ask you, gentlemen, is that the outcome of sanity or otherwise? I can anticipate your reply. It is the utterance of a madman, you will say, and I agree with you. When I undertook the prisoner's defence I felt assured that he was not guilty of the crime of murder. Now, I confess, my belief is shaken; but another conviction has been irresistibly borne in upon me—and in it I shall, I think, have your concurrence—it is, that the prisoner is insane; and, such being the case, I ask your lordship that the prisoner's state of mind may be inquired into, and that your lordship defers summing-up until to-morrow, with a view of such investigation being made."

Surprise and amazement was predicted on the face of every person in the court. His lordship, after consideration, said he would accede to the request; meanwhile the prisoner was, he directed, to be closely watched, and he would take the next case on the list.

* * * * *

The extraordinary turn affairs had taken was the one subject of conversation in the town of Eminster during the rest of the day and late into the night; one enterprising individual even cabled a brief account of the trial to a London news agency.

Before the assembling of the court on the day following, a man, evidently only just recovering from a serious illness, called at the judge's lodgings, and asked to see his lordship.

The witnesses, in what had been called the Lymeton mystery were hastily summoned, and one and all, on being confronted with him, immediately acknowledged the identity of the new arrival as the missing individual, for whose murder Martin Smith had been tried the day preceding.

His story was briefly as follows: It was, he said, quite true that he and the prisoner had, before retiring to rest, had a heated argument on the subject of anarchy, in which the prisoner had expressed himself as a strong believer. Early in the morning he—the missing man—had got up tempted by the fineness of the day, and, when dressing, his nose had commenced to bleed; he had endeavoured to staunch it as best he could, and seeing that the window of the room led into the garden, down a flight of steps, he emerged; hoping the fresh air would refresh him.

Arrived at the river he copiously bathed his face, and then went across the bridge. Suddenly it occurred to him that he was absolutely without money, his pocket-book having been left in his hand-bag which (as explained) had gone on in the train without him the night he came to the hotel; his sole luggage consisting of a travelling cap he had placed in his pocket.

When bathing his face he lost his round felt hat and put on his cap. Feeling better for his exercise in the fresh air, he continued his walk across some fields and presently came to a railway-station, thinking that he would find it somewhat embarrassing to go back to a strange hotel and have to explain that he had no money wherewith to pay his bill; he determined to take the next train home, his return ticket being in his pocket, and he was influenced in his decision by seeing an up train come into sight just as he approached the station. Once in the train it happened that his nose started bleeding afresh, and by the time he had reached his destination he had lost so much blood that he was compelled to call in a medical man, who informed him he had broken a blood-vessel, and was in a very critical state, as the result proved.

He was confined to his room for several weeks, and it was only by the merest chance that he saw in a daily paper an account of the Lymeton Mystery, on reading which, and realising the dire necessity of the case, he—ill as he still was—came on by the first train.

* * * * *

Martin Smith was not only liberated the same day, but, marvellous to relate, was also certified to be insane as well.

* * * * *

The warders of the prison in which he had been detained pending his trial, had never noticed anything unusual, and the medical men expressed their opinion that his mind had become unhinged only on the day of the trial itself; when he realised for the first time probably the terrible position in which he stood.

But the strangest part of this strange story remains to be told.

The defending counsel admitted to his learned brother—the prosecutor—when it was all over, that it was a sudden inspiration on his part to assume that his client was insane, and that he had not the slightest idea such was the case when he made the assertion, feeling that it was altogether hopeless to attempt any other line of defence.

S. J. F. Newbery.

NUMBER 53.

ONE beautiful evening, in the summer of 18——, I was seated with my friend, Captain P——, at the open window of his room, situated on the second storey of the end house in the Boulevard M——. Outside, in the square, a band was playing some lively music. Nursemaids, with little children, ran races to and fro.

An old veteran in a large straw hat was describing, with frantic gestures, how he had lost his arm. In a corner, beneath some trees, a flock of youngsters were romping with a monkey, and the rays of the setting sun glanced over the housetops, flickered upon the green foliage, and upon the white pavement, over which it cast long, straggling shadows.

For some time we had maintained a profound silence, when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old neighbour, Monsieur Sang.

He showed us a lottery ticket, which he said he had found secreted in the back of a book which he had bought the day before at one of the bookstalls.

I took the piece of paper and examined it. It was for five hundred thousand francs (£20,000), and would be drawn for in five weeks' time.

Captain P——, leaning out of the window, with his chin resting on his hands, had scarcely noticed the entrance of the old man, but when I called him, and held the scrap of flimsy paper out towards him, he turned terribly pale, and sank back into his seat.

"Number 53!" he murmured aghast.

Not another word could we get out of him. He sat pale and dumb, like one turned into stone.

Monsieur Sang placed the ticket inside his pocket-book, and muttered loud enough for us to hear——

"Five hundred thousand francs! Why, that is a fortune! But an old fool like me will never win."

"You will win!" suddenly cried the Captain in strange low tones, which made us both start.

"How can you tell, monsieur?" whispered the old man eagerly.

"I want you to get rid of that ticket, for as sure as we are living men, you will be the loser in the end."

"Ah! Perhaps you would like to secure the ticket, monsieur?" said the old fellow, with a peculiar smile.

The Captain only shrugged his shoulders, and turned to the window.

"I know," said Monsieur Sang, "that I could get a good sum for this ticket, if it were known I had it for sale. However, as the Captain is so positive it will be drawn, I will retain the ticket, and run the risk of being the loser. Five hundred thousand francs! Why, I see what it is; the Captain is jealous! Ha! ha!"

He went out, and as he descended the stairs I heard him mumbling——

"You will be the loser in the end. What can the Captain mean, I wonder? Five hundred—" But he gained the street, and I could hear no more.

I turned to Captain P——; he was standing silent and motionless at the window. Although his eyes were directed to where the performers stood, I knew from their fixed and steady gaze that he saw none.

For a long time I sat watching him, standing there so pale and silent, all the while racking my brain how to account for his strange conduct on seeing the number of the lottery ticket—number fifty-three. What painful recollections did these two figures recall to his mind? I asked myself this question over and over again, but I still remained in the dark.

All at once he closed the window, and simply said, as if speaking to himself——

"There can be no doubt about it! Number fifty-three is an accursed number!"

"I do not understand you, Captain," I said, for I began to feel curious.

He remained silent for some time as if in deep thought, and I did not interrupt him.

"Listen," he said suddenly, "and you can judge for yourself as to the truth of my statement."

He lit a cigarette, and drew his chair to the table.

"Eleven years ago," he began, "my father, although considered to be a very sensible man, invested a sum of money in a lottery. His ticket was drawn, and he became possessed of five hundred thousand francs. He was fortunate. So everybody said. I, too, thought so at the time. One evening he entered one of the gambling saloons, and becoming fascinated by the play, he lost all his ready money in a few hours. Then all his property went, and when he arose from the table at midnight he was a beggar. Maddened by his losses, and rendered insane by the knowledge of the grief of his family, he shot himself through the heart. His ticket was Number 53!"

"Yet I cannot see how that goes to prove your statement," I said. "The same thing could happen with any number."

"True," he replied. "I attached no importance to the number at the time. Four years went by, and I had almost forgotten Number 53, when a friend of mine in poor circumstances managed to buy a lottery ticket. He won, like my father, five hundred thousand francs. Poor fellow it was the price of his reason. The sudden rise to wealth turned his brain, and he is now an immate of an asylum. Now you will understand me when I tell you his ticket was Number 53!"

I shuddered, but remained silent.

"You can have an idea," he went on, "as to the state of my feelings on seeing Monsieur Sang in possession of a lottery ticket bearing the fatal Number 53!"

I could answer nothing. To me it seemed inexplicable.

The day of drawing slowly came round, and as the Captain had foretold, Monsieur Sang's ticket was drawn. Number 53 was announced the winner!

When the Captain heard it, he shook his head and murmured——

"Wait! Wait!"

Monsieur Sang forsook the Boulevard M——, and bought for himself a nice little villa. He was talked of as being a lucky man, and was envied by all, except Captain P——.

"You will be the loser in the end," the Captain had said. But now I began to think he was mistaken.

One morning, scarcely three months after the drawing, Captain P—— placed a newspaper before me, and without a word, pointed out a certain paragraph.

I read with almost stifled heart, that a thief had entered Monsieur Sang's house the night before, and while searching for the money, which was believed to be secreted in the house, he aroused the owner, whom he stabbed to death.

The Captain was right. Monsieur Sang was the loser!

There is a solution to every mystery. Can you solve the mystery of Number 53? Captain P——, and myself confess ourselves baffled. N. N.

THE OUTLAWS' TREASURE

CHAPTER XXXVI

The Cypher Stolen.

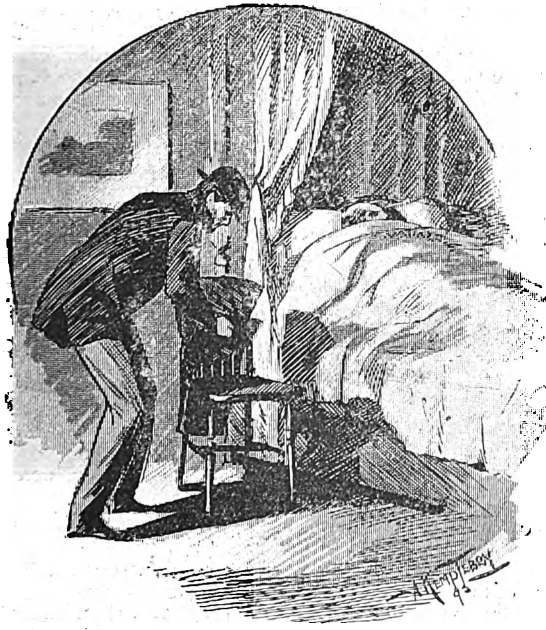
The discovery that Detective Squirrek made on his return from Judge Woodland's caused him no little uneasiness.

He remembered now during the conversation he had twice heard a slight noise at the window, and had turned his head inquiringly in that direction; but as it excited no remark either upon the part of the judge or his daughter, he did not think that it was the work of anything more than the wind or some stray cat.

But the more he reflected upon the circumstance the more satisfied did he become that it was the noise of an eavesdropper, and that whoever this might be, he had overheard everything that passed between the company.

“Furthermore,” he reflected, “this man does not belong in this town; he has followed me all the way from Chicago, suspecting that I carried some such secret.”

And then he fell to speculating upon the identity of the individual. This was all conjecture, as a matter of course, but so skilfully did he probe the matter, in his own mind, that when he retired to his room at the hotel he had fixed upon the man, and, as it afterwards proved, he was correct.



The cypher had been stolen.

That night Detective Squirrek very carefully placed his revolver under his pillow and left his door unlocked.

“If he wants to pay me a visit, I will not place anything in his way,” was his conclusion.

He believed that his pursuer would endeavour to enter the room during the night, and obtain possession of his paper, although there really was no necessity for doing so, if he had caught *all* the translation from the lips of the fair translator. But it was more than probable that he had not caught it all, but enough to give him the clue by which to read it for himself. The detective was drowsy, for he had slept but little during the past week. Still, he believed he could keep wide awake, as he had often done under similar circumstances.

An hour passed away, and all was still. In a country town like Somerville, the hotel closed comparatively early in the evening. He listened intently for stealthy footsteps along the hall—but none came, and he finally passed off into the land of unconsciousness.

“Jingo! but I must have slept soundly,” muttered Detective Squirrek, sitting on the edge of his bed and rubbing his eyes, while the rays of the morning sun diffused their golden sunlight over the floor. “I intended to keep awake, but must have forgotten all about it.”

He seemed unusually drowsy, and rubbed and rubbed his eyes, and gaped and gaped, and stretched and finally staggered to his feet.

“Hullo! how came my trousers there? I am sure I left them across the chair at the head of my bed, and there they lie in the middle of the floor—”

All at once he stopped, and began snuffing the air of the room.

“My gracious! there is no mistaking *that* smell. If that isn't chloroform, then I ain't—”

He paused again, as he fumbled over his trousers, and whipped out his pocket-book. There lay all the bank notes, snugly folded, and plump and tempting; but wedged in between them where he had carefully placed the paper last evening was—nothing.

The cypher had been stolen.

Detective Squirrek solemnly completed his toilet like a man who was preparing for a funeral.

When it was completed, and he was ready to descend to his breakfast, he placed both hands in his pockets, and looked down at the floor, his favourite attitude when in a brown study.

“No,” he muttered, with a sad shake of his head. “I am in the situation of the man whose apples rolled out of his waggon without his knowing it. I can't do justice to it. But it's funny. Here I set a trap to catch him, and he caught me, and that, too, as completely as ever a patent trap nabbed a mouse. That young gentleman has got the start of me, and if I ain't careful he will keep it.”

He hastily swallowed his breakfast, during which a horse attached to a light trap was brought to the door, and ten minutes later he was bowling along towards the home of Fred Weldon.

“Just in time!” he exclaimed, reining up, as he encountered the young man coming out of the gate. “Jump in; important business.”

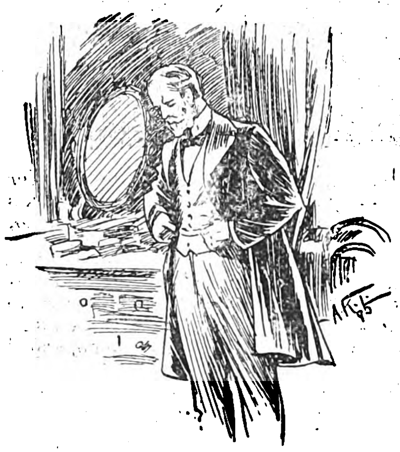
As soon as they were fairly beyond the town, Squirrek drew his horse down to a walk, and explained the translation of the cypher, and, in fact, all he knew about it, up to its disappearance during the preceding night.

"Do you remember that Doctor Ruthven, who was so assiduous in his attentions to you?" he asked, at the conclusion of his recital.

"I rather think I do," replied Fred, with a laugh.

"Well, he is the man that has followed me."

"No; impossible!"



Detective Squirrek solemnly completed his toilet.

"I am sure of it, and could give you a dozen reasons that would convince you, if it were necessary. The Cuban, Almanaz, must have given him to understand the nature of the secret he carried, and he has managed to learn, or at least to suspect, that I was following it up, and he had only need to watch me."

"And you did not know that you were followed?"

"Never suspected it until I was returning from Judge Woodland's ——"

"But suppose he has the cypher—and it looks very strongly that way—and suppose he can read it, what good will it do him?"

"The same good that it will us. You see that this looks as if the '*Fifty yards north, under the white oak*' is the spot where the Mulligans buried the greater amount of their thievery. In all probability there is enough there to tempt a man to undertake any risk, especially such an unprincipled one as Doctor Ruthven."

"You are afraid he will get the start of us?"

"That's it; and finding that he himself cannot defeat us, he can easily spread the tidings through the town of what we are searching for, and in six hours there would be a thousand people surging up and down Devil's Creek as crazy over this as they were over the oil discoveries in Pennsylvania, and you see what a prospect there would be for us."

"Have you noticed one thing?" asked young Weldon, as they rode quietly along; "there is a very important omission in this cypher of yours, and one which is going to make no little difficulty."

"No, I haven't observed it, and Miss Woodland didn't refer to it," replied the detective in no little surprise.

"There is no starting point given you. It says '*fifty yards north.*' Now, 'fifty yards north' of what? That's the question."

"Why—I declare I never thought of that," replied the detective, with a laugh. "Singular, isn't it?"

"If Doctor Ruthven finds the starting point before us, he will have just that much the advantage."

"You are right," replied Squirrek, giving his horse a sharp cut with the whip, which sent him bounding along the road at a rattling pace.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Searching for the Treasure.

It was a clear morning in the Indian summer, when there was just enough warmth in the sunshine to make it the most delightful season of the year. There was a mellow smoky haze resting upon hill and meadow, and a quiet stillness in the atmosphere, such as is seen only during the lingering days of summer.

Detective Squirrek was a good judge of horseflesh, and he was driving behind an admirable traveller, which passed every vehicle on the road excepting one.

Perhaps a third of a mile ahead of them, as they whirled round a bend in the road, they detected a man seated in a trap, who raised a cloud of dust as he sped swiftly forward over the highway.

"I think we can pass that trap," said the detective, straightening up in his seat, and putting his horse to his best gait.

The fugitive, as he might be termed, sped along at an astonishing rate, and soon proved that he was able to maintain his relative position without the least difficulty.

He was not seen to look behind even once while this desperate attempt was being made to overtake him, but seemed to know, as if by intuition, that he was pursued.

For fully an hour the exciting chase continued, at the end of which time it could not be seen that the distance between the pursuer and pursued had decreased in the least. On the contrary Weldon declared that they had lost ground.

"Let him go!" exclaimed Squirrek, reining up, so as to let him get out of sight.

"That is a philosophical way of taking it when you can't help it," laughed Weldon.

"Do you know who that gentleman is?" asked his companion.

"Certainly not."

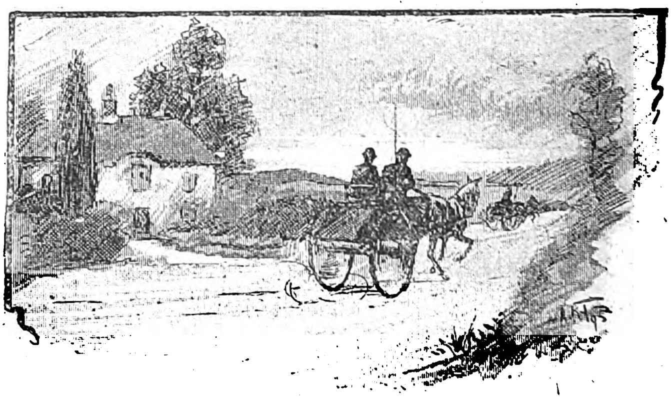
"I am certain that it is no one else but Doctor Ruthven. I thought at first that we would try and pass him, and then leave him behind; but, as we can't do that, we will let him leave us."

This was easily effected. The Jehu ahead continued his furious driving, and soon disappeared in a cloud of dust, while our friends continued with a good pace, so as not to lose too much ground.

There were many miles yet to travel, and it was past noon when they reached the road bridge crossing Devil's Creek, and at the nearest inn they put up their horses, and then went on foot.

"If that was Doctor Ruthven," said the detective, "we shall be very likely to encounter him somewhere in the wood."

The stream where they crossed it was quite small. About half a mile further down in the woods, the banks spread out and deepened into a gorge, over which the noted High Bridge of the railway was erected, and where Fred Weldon came so near meeting his death.



For fully an hour the exciting chase continued.

Turning down into the wood, they moved cautiously forward, carefully looking about them to see whether they were followed, and to make sure as to whether or not there was any one ahead of them.

In this manner they advanced until they reached the bridge, over which at that moment, and high above their heads, a train of carriages was passing.

"Now from what point do we start to measure off our fifty yards?" asked Fred Weldon, as they paused for a few moments.

"That *is* the point, indeed. I have had the idea all along that this bridge is the starting point."

"Have you any reason for thinking so?"

"No—only a sort of instinctive feeling. We shall soon learn, however, whether I am right or not. Now you take the other side, and I will this, and we will see what we can see."

"I suppose I am to make search for a white oak?"

"We will both look for such an object."

Squirrek remained on the upper part of the bridge, while Weldon passed below. There was a rapid beating of the hearts of both, as the feeling came over them that perhaps they were now upon the eve of an important discovery—one which very probably would have a great influence upon their future lives.

The detective fixed that keen grey eye of his upon a point that he judged to be about fifty yards distant; and then slowly turning on his heel, scanned every tree that came within his range of vision.

This was repeated again and again, but the conclusion was that he had not seen a single tree that would answer the description.

"I have failed completely," said he, passing through to where Weldon was standing in the same position. "What have you discovered? Anything?"

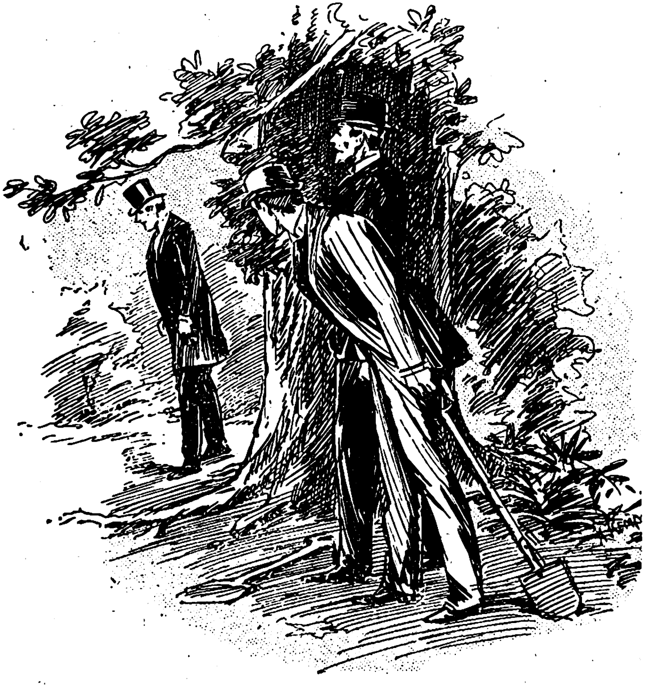
"My idea of what we want is still invisible," was the reply; "but off yonder, a short distance to the left, is what possibly may be the object of our search."

"I very much doubt it; it is too small. Let me take a look also."

He took several, but was compelled to accept the conclusion of his young friend.

The two men made their way to the tree that had attracted the attention of both, but, on nearing it, it was found to be a moderately-sized maple.

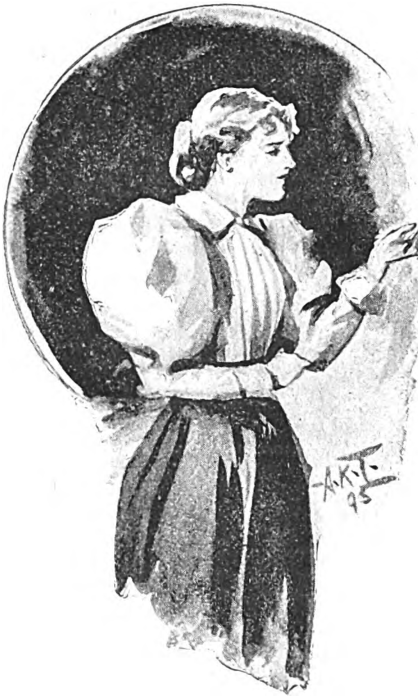
They stared at it a moment in silence, and then the detective remarked with his laugh:



Doctor Ruthven emerged to view.

"No use in digging there."

"It will do no harm to try," said Weldon, showing a disposition to use his shovel; but his companion shook his head.



"I examined it very carefully."

"Love's labour lost; we must go back to Somerville, call on Miss Woodland, and get her to help us out of the difficulty—sh!"

The crackling of undergrowth caught their hearing, and, stooping down, they both concealed themselves in the undergrowth, which grew here quite luxuriantly.

A moment later Doctor Ruthven emerged to view, walking slowly down the ravine, with the air and manner of a man who was searching for something.

He frequently paused and looked about him, but, failing to discover that for which he was searching, he finally disappeared from view.

"There goes another poor fellow groping in the dark," laughed the detective. "Now for Judge Woodland's."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A Disappointment and a Fresh Start.

The evening succeeding the fruitless search of Fred Weldon and the detective, both were seated in the parlour of Judge Woodland, himself and daughter being present.

The embarrassment between the young lady and the young lawyer was mutual, and was watched with no little interest by the detective, who was now satisfied that everything was moving along smoothly in *that* direction. He managed to throw them together during the early part of the interview as much as possible, and they finally succeeded in engaging in a sort of fragmentary conversation.

They were left thus alone for some time, but as the detective had called upon business, he was compelled to state it.

Florence Woodland listened until the request was stated, and then she asked for the writing.

"I have lost it," replied the detective, who did not care to explain the manner by which it had left his possession.

"I don't know that it makes any difference, for I am certain there was nothing more upon it. When you first sent it to me, I examined it very carefully, and would have noted anything else."

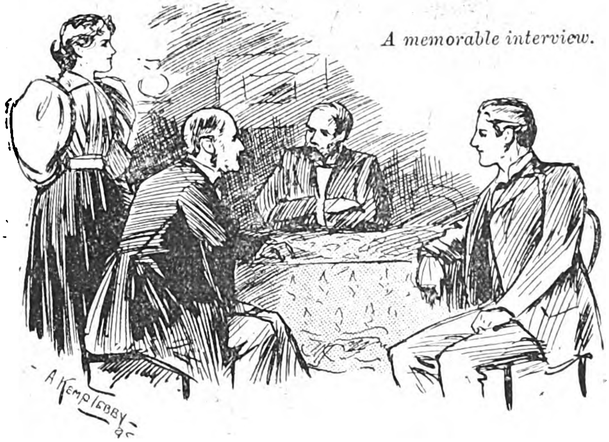
"Can you give us no additional clue, then?" he said.

She thought for a moment before replying.

"I do not see how it can be done."

"Then we are off the track entirely, which perhaps is for the best, as I am urgently needed in Cincinnati, and am under a partial promise to be there this week. I will go, and leave Weldon here to work out the problem. Perhaps he may succeed in doing so. I observe, judge, you are laughing."

The old gentleman was twirling his spectacles in his hand, and smiling like one who was enjoying something all to himself.



A memorable interview.

"It serves you right for not coming to *me* for assistance, instead of going to Florence, who is totally lost."

"*You,*" repeated the detective in turn. "Indeed we deserve censure for forgetting you."

"That you do, and I am tempted to allow you to remain in ignorance for your criminal forgetfulness."

"We can only bow our heads meekly to the infliction," was the humble reply.

"Then you acknowledge that it is deserved?"

"We do."

After jesting in this manner for some minutes the judge became serious.

"Laying this badinage aside, I really have the power to assist you out of your dilemma."

All listened attentively to his words.

"You fixed upon High Bridge as your standpoint, and there is where you made your fatal error."

"What should we have done?"

"The directions, as you have them, or as you did have them, until you lost them, clearly imply that your point of observation should have been at the *beginning* of Devil's Creek."

"At the beginning," exclaimed Squirrek. "I suppose the stream commences up country in some little spring, or drips from underneath a rock."

"Not so fast. Many years ago, when I was a youngster, and used to go hunting and nutting in the woods, I recollect that the stream along which you made your search was not known as Devil's Creek. About a third of a mile below High Bridge a smaller stream debouches into this one, and from the point of their junction until it empties into the river, ten miles distant, the brook bore the euphonious name which of late years, and especially since the railway was built, has been applied to the other. Take your station at the junction of these two, and my word for it, you will have no difficulty in finding the white oak for which you so longingly sigh."

The next question of the detective was characteristic.

"It seems singular that these men should have been aware of this fact regarding the name of the stream."

"Not at all; they daily came in contact with many of the old inhabitants, and very naturally heard of it."

"Well, you deserve the medal," was the enthusiastic commentary of Squirrek. "You have cut the Gordian knot."

Once or twice during the interview the officer had taken the liberty of going outside to see whether there were any eavesdroppers. On each occasion when he did so he placed his hand upon his revolver, and had he seen Doctor Ruthven there can be little doubt of what would have followed.

But the coast was found clear, and as all were guarded in their tones during conversation, they had the satisfaction of knowing the secret was with them alone.

During this memorable interview there were many stolen glances between Florence Woodland and Fred Weldon. She, who was so brilliant and so completely herself in any assemblage, experienced a strange, nervous uneasiness in the presence of this former playmate of her childhood, which showed itself in a hesitancy and abruptness of speech, and a tendency to look down upon the carpet immediately in front of her.

And Fred Weldon, who had confronted the most towering legal minds of his country, and fearlessly joined issue with them, was a child in this regal presence.

Occasionally their glances met, and at such times a blush suffused the faces of both. When the "good-nights" were said she lingered in the room, as though she were unable to accompany him to the door.

All the indications were that the young but powerful love in the hearts of both was giving unmistakable evidence of its existence and growth.

The following morning the two men were on the road again, and about the middle of the forenoon were standing under the High Bridge, Fred Weldon with a shovel on his shoulder, and Adolph Squirrek, with an instrument generally known as an adze, principally used for cutting away the roots of trees.

They had made cautious inquiries, and carefully looked about for Doctor Ruthven, but had not seen him since the meeting in the wood.

At this stage of the proceedings it was all important that their motions should escape observation, and the detective said:

"You move ahead, and I will follow at a safe distance. If I see anything suspicious I will whistle, and you must wait for me to come up with you."

The "line of march" was taken up in this fashion, and proceeded slowly, as the officer was resolved not to spoil everything by a misstep at the beginning.

On every side he glanced, frequently pausing and walking backwards and listening for the slightest sound; but all went well.

They were now in the very depths of the wood, and it seemed to the men, as they trod stealthily along, that they were stealing their way into an enemy's camp.

The detective was walking along in this cautious manner, when he unexpectedly came upon his companion.

"What is the matter? What are you waiting for?" he asked, in some surprise.

He replied by pointing a rod or two in advance, to where a small stream poured into the one which they were following.

"There is Judge Woodland's standpoint."

"So it is; now we will both take an observation."

Both did so, and at the first glance caught sight of a large, towering white oak, about fifty yards to the north of them.

"The judge was right," exclaimed the detective, his face lighting up with the glow of a man who has conquered victory at last; "we are on the eve of success."

Both looked at each other, as if undecided what to do next. The officer, as usual, took the lead.

"Walk down the stream a hundred yards, and I will go up the same distance. We must not be discovered at this work."

This precautionary measure was acted upon, and a most searching reconnaissance made, resulting in the discovery of no living creature in the woods besides themselves.

Both came back and stood by the trunk of the tree, and Weldon looked inquiringly in the face of his friend.

"Begin," said the latter, "and when the roots stop you I will strike a blow."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Discovery of the Treasure.

A strange feeling came over the young man as he pressed the shovel down into the soft alluvium. The thought of what in all probability was a few feet underneath his shovel, and the strange dreams of the future that in those few brief moments flashed through his mind, almost unnerved him for the time.

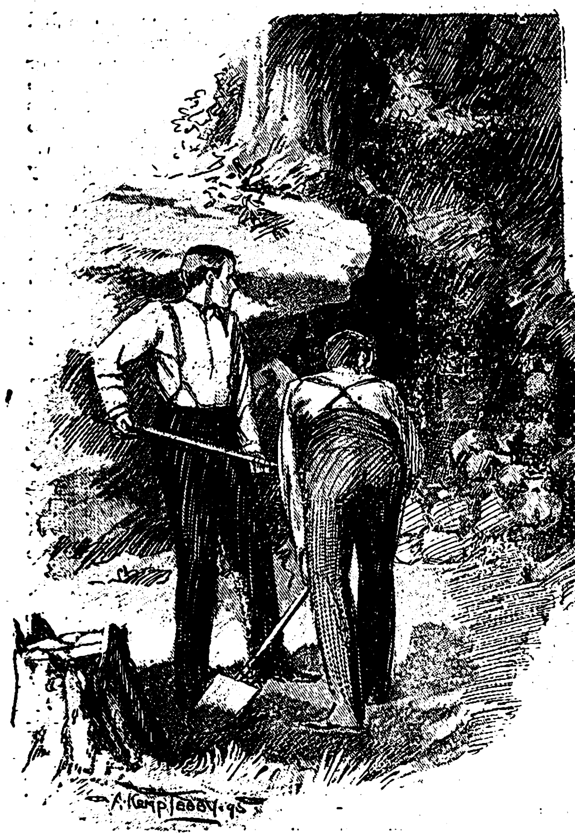
But he worked all the harder, as if to force back these tumultuous imaginings which were thronging upon him.

Even Detective Squirrek, grim, stern, and emotionless, standing like a statue, except that his sharp glance flitted through the wood, and then down upon the work before him, was more nervous than he had been for a long time.

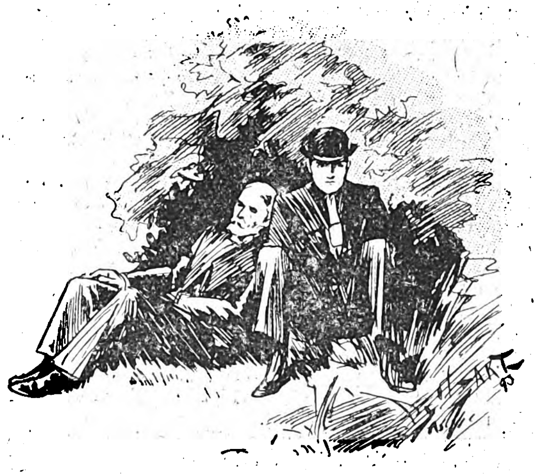
But he had an iron will, and there was no ebullition upon the surface to show the tumult below.

He stood ready with his adze to take his turn at the work, should any roots be encountered, but Weldon found nothing more than soft earth to resist the action of his implement.

Furthermore, as he toiled, he found that he was passing through a network of roots that had been cut off near the trunk, and by the sides of the aperture he was delving.



The hidden treasure was discovered.



The men were thoroughly exhausted.

"What does that mean?" asked Weldon, pausing in his work, and looking up in his companion's face.

"That we are repeating what has been done before. Those roots have all been carefully cut away for some purpose."

"I wonder what purpose?" he asked significantly, as he leant upon his shovel.

"We shall probably learn in a few minutes. Let me take a turn at the work."

"No; I am not tired."

But Squirrek was anxious to try his hand, for he felt need of doing something to repress his excitement, which was increasing upon him.

So he grasped the shovel, and laboured with an almost desperate fierceness, that soon placed him waist-deep in the pit which he was excavating.

The detective had laboured scarcely ten minutes, when, thinking he was working too far from the tree, he thrust the shovel into the wall of earth in front of him.

As he did so it broke through the thin soft crust, and the blow being quite a powerful one, the shovel went clean through, almost the length of the handle, throwing him upon his hands and knees.

The dirt and *débris* came tumbling down, and displayed a cavernous opening, some five or six feet in height and breadth, the dirt of which must have been skilfully scooped out and carried away, while the ground above was covered with leaves, so as to effectually conceal what had been done from any who might accidentally wander that way.

The Hidden Treasure was discovered!

Over thirty sacks, filled with golden coin, lay piled upon each other like so many salt bags. Each was filled so nearly full that there was only barely room to tie the tops, while the strong canvas seemed ready to burst with its concentrated wealth.

Besides this, there were a dozen boxes of diamonds and the most valuable jewellery. Hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of plunder was spread out before their eyes.

For a few seconds the two men were speechless. Great drops of perspiration stood upon the brows of each, and they were almost overcome.

"Now what's to be done with it?" was the first question of Weldon.

"Get it out of there, and deposit it in the nearest bank, and then advertise for the claimants to this."

But the first part of this was no slight task. The weight was sufficient to make a good load for a horse, and the nearest point to which they could bring their waggon was fully a mile away.

The secret was too valuable and tempting to be trusted to a third party, and the only thing that could be done was to carry the coin and jewellery piecemeal to the waggon.

After a careful deliberation, the course of action was decided upon. It was determined to transport the treasure to a point within a few rods of the road, and there conceal it until the morrow, when it could be placed in the carriage in a few minutes, and carried to the Cornwall bank for safe-keeping.

Fred Weldon loaded himself with all the sacks he felt able to carry, and started up the ravine, while the detective remained behind to watch the treasure during his absence.

In the course of an hour he returned, and described the place where he had concealed it with such minuteness that there was no fear of the other experiencing any difficulty in finding it.

Now Squirrek loaded himself down and started on his tramp. When he came in sight of High Bridge he heard the whistle of an approaching train, and carefully kept out of sight until it had passed. His load cautiously placed in position he rejoined his friend.

This procedure was kept up until more than one-half the treasure had been deposited under some thick shrubbery in full sight of the main road, when the sentry post was changed to this place, and maintained until the last load was removed.

By this time night was closing in, and the men were thoroughly exhausted and used up. They sat down panting, and drew their handkerchiefs across their heated brows.

"Here we must spend the night, I suppose," said Weldon.

Although both were so greatly exhausted, they were too feverish and excited to sleep. The detective lit his cigar and smoked, and recounted many of his surprising experiences to Weldon, who became greatly interested in them, and they found the hours passed much more rapidly than they had anticipated.

When it began to grow light Weldon cautiously left their retreat and made his way to the tavern where the horse and carriage had been left. He was too "flustered" to feel the need of food, but he procured a lunch for himself and Squirrek, and, as soon as his horse was harnessed, was speeding down the road again.

The entire treasure was placed in the carriage without attracting the attention of any passers-by, and at an early hour they started towards Cornwall. It was speedily discovered that their vehicle was loaded to its utmost capacity, and it was dangerous to travel faster than a walk.

At this gait they proceeded, first one walking beside the carriage and then the other, so as not to tax their animal too much, or incur too great a risk of breaking down.

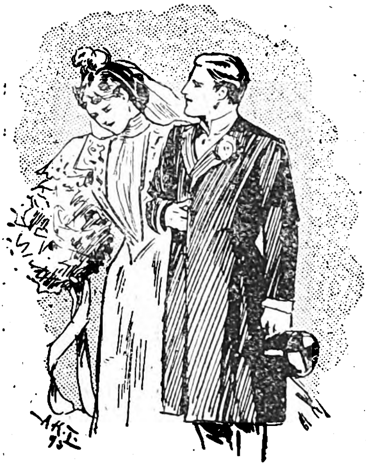
CHAPTER XL.

All Ends in the Usual Way—Happily.

It was about noon when Fred and Squirrek entered the small town of Cornwall. They went straight to the bank, where, as may be supposed, their appearance created no little excitement; but in a few words the detective explained matters to the manager, who happened to be in, and in a very short time the treasure was safely deposited in the vault, and a receipt given to Squirrek, who, after another consultation with the officers, explaining fully his intentions, took his departure with Weldon to the hotel, where they enjoyed their dinner, and, for the first time since they had fairly got into this business, felt at liberty to breathe freely, and take a few minutes' rest.

Detective Squirrek next began an elaborate attempt to trace the recovered property to the rightful owners. There were marks upon the jewel-cases and some of the jewellery itself which enabled him to discover the parties from whom it had been stolen, especially as he advertised the articles very widely.

Multitudes of false claimants appeared, but they found themselves dealing with a man too shrewd to be deceived. Nearly all of those who regained their valuables in this manner pressed some souvenirs upon the officer, who resolutely refused to receive any reward from them in that shape.



All ends in the usual way.

After every effort had been exhausted, there still remained something over eighty thousand dollars in gold for which no owners could be found. It looked as if the Mulligans had brought a large portion of their booty from a distance.

Several carrier companies were able to identify their bags of coin from the peculiar marks upon them, and each of these had the manliness to send a handsome fee to the man who had been instrumental in recovering it, and he was sensible enough to accept it from them.

The end of the whole matter was that when the business was fairly wound up Detective Squirrek found about a hundred thousand dollars in his hands. One half of this was given to Fred Weldon, who positively refused to take it until the sum which the detective had previously given his mother was deducted from his share.

This compromise was finally agreed upon, and so ended the history of the hidden and recovered treasure.

During these proceedings Doctor Ruthven was once or twice seen in Somerville and Cornwall, as if he were meditating some scheme by which to gain a share of the riches of the two men, but evidently he was unable to discover any method, for he finally disappeared altogether.

For a time young Fred Weldon was somewhat dazzled by the large fortune thus placed in his hands.

Taking the advice of Squirrek and Judge Woodland, he invested it in land where there was a certainty of a rapid appreciation in value, and devoted himself with renewed energy to the practice of his profession, living in Somerville, and studying and labouring hard.

Detective Squirrek took his departure for other scenes of his peculiar labour, where by the last accounts he was still engaged at work that evidently suited him.

Encouraged by his own trembling hope, Fred Weldon became bolder in his visits to Judge Woodland's, as he saw that his coming lit up the eye of the fair being who was there, and brought the blush to her cheek as she met him at the door and bade him good-bye.

The course of true love ran smooth in this instance—that is, dating from its outward beginning, but the vast trials encountered by the hero, when his great passion was all unspoken, were such as to verify the observation of the immortal Bard of Avon.

It was a marriage which all, even those who were most keenly disappointed, admitted was eminently fit to be made, and the most misanthropic could not refuse the couple their best wishes for a safe and pleasant journey through life.

The End.

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THE MISERY OF CORPULENCY.

A copy has come to hand of the just issued 18th edition of Mr. F. Cecil Russell's "Corpulency, and the Cure" (246 pages), the clever little volume which, more than anything else, has brought a revolution in the treatment of obesity. That the still larger circulation implied by the issue of the new edition of this popular work is necessary is proved by such a paragraph as the following. It appears among the answers to correspondents in the "Dress and Fashion" column of a Sunday newspaper with a large circulation: "Miserable.—A young girl of 18 ought not to have such a large stomach that no dress looks well. Perhaps you require exercise and dieting." The helpless vagueness of this reply to a young girl who is naturally "miserable" on account of her unseemly obesity is a sufficient evidence that Mr. Russell does well in seeking to make known, even more widely than they are at present, the simplicity, the efficiency, the rapidity, and the delightful surroundings of his treatment for the reduction of superabundant fat. The young girl in question, who might exercise and diet herself for months without any appreciable improvement, may easily learn to imitate the example of thousands of ladies of all ages, who, by the use of Mr. Russell's pure vegetable preparation, have reduced their weight at the rate of pounds per week, and sometimes (but only when necessary, for the working of the cure is virtually automatic, stopping its effects when the normal limit is reached) stones per month. She may acquire this open secret—for the author makes no mystery about the ingredients of his recipe, by sending six penny stamps to Mr. Russell's offices, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., when a copy of the book will be sent post free. If she follows his instructions, "Miserable," without any fasting regimen, and without excessive exercise, will find herself being quickly reduced to shapely proportions, with an improved appetite, and full liberty to gratify it.

LONGEVITY AND CORPULENCY.

We have received a copy of the just issued 18th edition of Mr. F. Cecil Russell's "Corpulency, and the Cure" (Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.). This issue is in itself indicative of the widespread influence which the author now exercises as a successful expert in the treatment of obesity, while the additions to the evidence which, as a statistician, he is in the habit of collecting on the subject are suggestive of some curious reflections. It is evident that Mr. Russell is annually treating thousands of cases of excessive fat with a success which, in the rapidity and the permanence of its manifestation is truly marvellous. That the enormous popularity of his system is likely to increase in the future is most probable, because it is free from all the drawbacks which have rendered the Banting and other methods of reducing corpulence unacceptable to the majority of the sufferers, who have regarded these cures as rather worse than the complaint. By attacking the causes rather than the symptoms of obesity, he strengthens the digestive organs, thus actually increasing, instead of decreasing, the appetite, while the surplus weight is being reduced at a wonderfully rapid rate, amounting to pounds per week, and often stones per month. Add to this that there is no mystery about the nature of the absolutely innoculous preparation, the recipe for which Mr. Russell supplies in his capital little volume (256 pages), which may be obtained post free by sending six penny stamps to the author's offices, at the address given above. It seems certain, therefore, that, as a result of the happy revolution which the patient research of this specialist, with the aid of a distinguished physician as a collaborateur, has effected, the average of longevity will, before long, be appreciably raised. Obesity is, indeed, one of the few antagonistic influences remaining which, especially among the more prosperous classes, prevent the great majority of people of both sexes becoming centenarians. With advanced ideas in regard to wholesome food, clothing, and sanitary arrangements, it only remains to get rid of clogging fat to live an ideally hygienic, and therefore, a very prolonged life.

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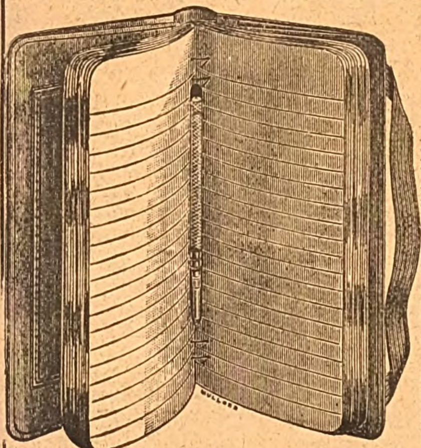

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 349. FOR WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 7TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

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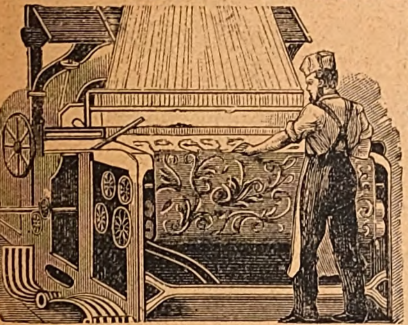

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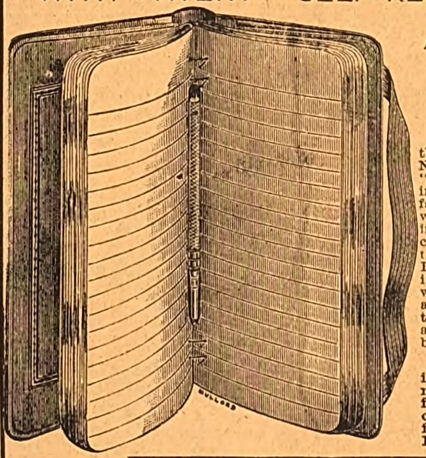

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Chronic Indigestion.
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The approach of this obstinate complaint may be clearly recognised by Pain, Fulness, and General Uneasiness after Food, Loss of Appetite (especially for Breakfast), Foul Tongue, Nausea, Sleepiness, Flushings of the Face, Redness about the Nose, Sick-Headache, and Giddiness. By bracing up the Mucous Membrane of the Stomach, increasing the quantity and improving the quality of the Gastric Juice, Guy's Tonic acts in a most wonderful way on every form of indigestion.

A CORRESPONDENT writes: "Will you allow me to add my testimony to the great value of Guy's Tonic? It restored my Appetite, cleared the Tongue, and acted most beneficially on the Liver and Nerves. It also gave me Refreshing Sleep, Freedom from Dreams, and a Pleasant Waking. The Distressing Symptoms of Melancholia and Despondency have never returned since I took the first bottle of Guy's Tonic."

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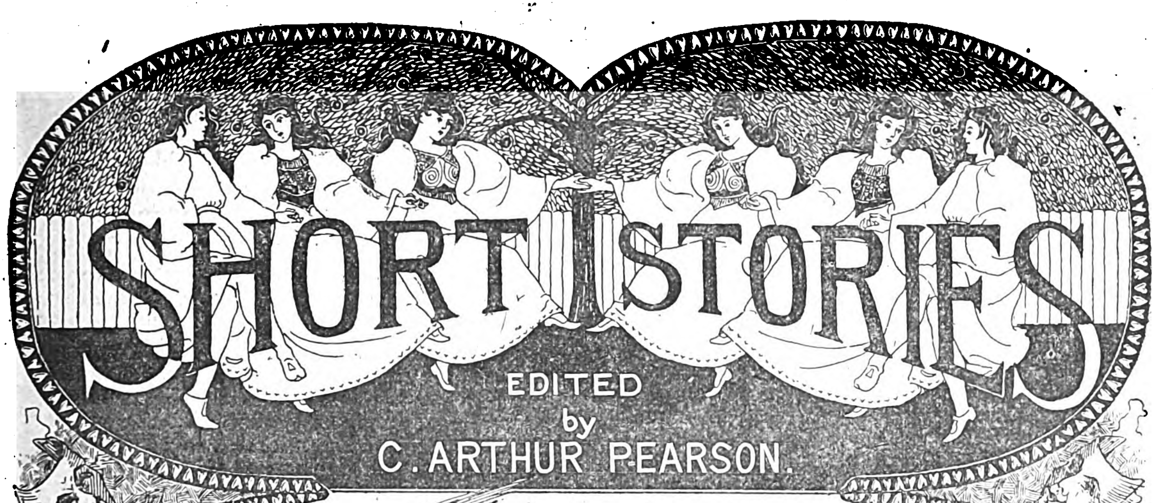


No. 349.] [One Penny.

For the Week ending September 7th, 1895.

ROMANCE
ADVENTURE
HUMOUR
LOVE
WAR
PATHOS

A BUNCH OF GREENS.

An individual whose right arm was encased in splints and hung in a sling entered a magnificent jewellery shop, the proprietor of which was a Mr. James Green. The stranger had that in his appearance generally styled *distingué.* His carriage and garb revealed the military veteran, and his manners the finished gentleman. At the door halted an elegant carriage, and the good taste of its owner was made apparent by the plain but neat livery of the groom and the choice trappings of the handsome high-bred horses.

The stranger stated that he was desirous of procuring a complete silver table service, rich, solid, and elegant, with but little ornamentation. Could Mr. Green prepare such an one for him? The goldsmith answered, of course, in the affirmative, and showed several patterns to his visitor, who then described very minutely the style in which he wished the articles to be made, and asked by what time they could be got ready. At the same time he insisted on punctuality, saying he must use the set at a reception he would soon give at his new residence in Leicester Square. Green promised to have it done in three weeks, and then the two parties discussed the terms.

The jeweller very carefully made up all his calculations, and demanded twelve hundred pounds. The stranger reflected a few moments, then said he had determined on getting a service at the cost of fifteen hundred pounds, and requested Mr. Green to add as many more pieces to the set as would fix the price at that sum. Mr. Green thanked the gentleman for this mark of confidence, and inquired of him to whose recommendation he owed his patronage.

"No one has recommended you to me," replied he.

The jeweller looked up in surprise. The stranger, who had hitherto worn an air of dignity almost amounting to austerity, now became more friendly, and continued:

"I'm a soldier. I have served for years in India, and more recently in Egypt. At Tel-el-Kebir I received a severe wound in my right arm and hand which will perhaps disable the member for life. My patronage you owe to your parents, grandparents, and, in fact, to the whole line of your ancestors."

The jeweller was amazed and bewildered. His parents and other ancestors had long been dead, and could not have referred the soldier to him. The latter apparently enjoyed Mr. Green's perplexity, and smilingly continued:

"I will make myself clearer. When, in consequence of this unfortunate wound"—here a sudden twinge in his arm made him start painfully—"I was compelled to leave the service, I resolved to settle down in London. While riding out the other day I was attracted by the appearance of your splendidly-furnished shop, but more so by the name on your sign, for mine is precisely the same. To this simple reason you owe the present visit of Colonel James Green, of the Grenadier Guards."

All rights reserved.]

The jeweller expressed his delight at the honour of being the namesake of so distinguished a warrior, and, after a few more pleasantries of this nature, reverted to the business in hand.

"May I now inform you," said the jeweller, with some hesitation, "of the conditions which must generally be complied with previous to making a sale?"

"No," said the Colonel sharply; "I have my own way of doing business. You and I do not know each other, and although my order is not an uncommonly large one, yet it amounts to a sum with which you cannot credit a stranger. I will, therefore, pay you one hundred pounds cash down for a surety, the remaining fourteen hundred pounds when I call for the service."

Mr. Green accepted the offer with profuse thanks.

"You need not thank me," the officer interrupted; "as I remarked, I always have a way of my own, from which I never like to deviate. Now, do me the favour to take my pocket-book from my coat pocket, my unfortunate wound"—the Colonel again winced with pain—"has lamed my right arm and hand completely."

Mr. Green expressed his sympathy in the warmest terms, carefully pulled the pocket-book from the veteran's coat, opened it at the latter's desire, and from four or five new notes took one, which the Colonel requested him to keep. Mr. Green wrote off a receipt, and placed it in the old pocket-book, which he then very carefully restored to its resting place. He then assisted the Colonel to enter the carriage, and the groom—Colonel Green could not drive on account of his injured arm—rapidly drove off in the direction of Leicester Square. The jeweller, though much overjoyed, was a cautious business man, and, notwithstanding the considerable deposit, proceeded to make his safety certain.

In the "War List" he readily found the name and rank of his customer, just as they had been given, and from the estate agent who rented out the splendid mansion in Leicester Square he had ascertained that it had recently been occupied by Colonel James Green, of the Guards, and that the latter had brought the most excellent recommendations from his banker, and sundry other distinguished personages.

In the course of three weeks, at the end of which the set was to be done, the Colonel often came into the shop to see how the work was going on, and always discoursed so affably with the goldsmith that the latter could not find sufficient words of praise for his genial customer when speaking to others about him. At last the service was completed. It was placed upon a large table and covered with a cloth of blue velvet. Punctual at the stipulated time in the afternoon Colonel Green entered the shop, his excellent carriage with the spirited horses remaining before the door in care of the groom.

The officer stepped into the room, and Mr. Green, swelling with pride, removed the velvet cloth from the service. The Colonel, though usually a quiet man, declared that it surpassed his expectations, and insisted upon paying the entire one thousand five hundred pounds, and also upon the jeweller retaining the deposit of one hundred pounds as a *douceur* for the satisfaction he had given.

"Now to business," said the Colonel. "Be so kind as to take out my pocket-book and count off your one thousand five hundred pounds, for I do not wish to tarry a moment before showing your *chef d'œuvre* to my wife."

The jeweller hastened to comply. He took from the officer's breast coat pocket a card-case, a set of ivory tablets, and a silk purse, through whose meshes glittered some five or six sovereigns, but no pocket-book. Upon the Colonel's request he then examined all of his pockets. The search was futile.

"Strange. Incomprehensible. Could I have lost it, or been robbed?" muttered the Colonel, audibly perplexed and provoked. "What o'clock is it?" he suddenly asked.

"Twenty minutes to five."

"Good; it is time enough. You must make yourself serviceable to me once more, my dear Mr. Green, and act as my secretary. You know I cannot use my right hand. Will you have the goodness to write a few lines for me to my wife?"

With these words the Colonel stepped to the jeweller's desk, on which lay some writing paper, printed with the name of the firm. Taking a sheet, he placed it before the jeweller, saying: "This will do; my wife knows that I am here." He then dictated, and the jeweller wrote:

> MY DEAR WIFE,—Have the goodness to send me at once fifteen hundred pounds, through the bearer. You know where the money is kept. I am in immediate need of it; therefore, do not detain the messenger, who is a trustworthy person.
>
> Your affectionate husband,
>
> JAMES GREEN.

"Thank you," said the Colonel, after perusing the epistle. "Michael," he cried, "take this letter, drive home as fast as you can, and return at once to this place with that which my wife will give you."

The groom took the letter, bowed, and quickly went off.

Fifteen minutes, a half-hour, nearly an hour passed away, and Michael did not return. The Colonel waxed impatient, and wished that he had gone in person for the money. The jeweller essayed to tranquillise him, but ineffectually.

The Colonel could contain himself no longer.

"Do me the favour, Mr. Green, to call a cab," he said, in the greatest impatience. "I shall go home myself and will return within half an hour."

The cab drove off as rapidly as the horse could go. The goldsmith meantime had the service packed up, and then waited for his patron's return. The clock struck six, seven, eight, nine. The Colonel did not come. Something unusual must have detained him; but the jeweller felt no anxiety, for had he not still the service and a deposit of one hundred pounds?

Tired of waiting, at last he closed his shop at half-past nine, and went home. His wife who had long been expecting him, had grown sleepy, and was slumbering on a sofa. An open letter lay in her lap. Mr. Green stepped lightly to her, intending to wake her with a kiss, when his eye fell upon the letter.

"What is this?" he cried dumfounded, as he recognised his own handwriting and the letter he had just written for the Colonel.

The reader can readily guess the sequel and the connection.

True, there existed a right Colonel Green, who had served in India, and had been wounded at Tel-el-Kebir, who had rented a house in Leicester Square, and who possessed a considerable fortune, but, alas, he was not the Colonel Green who had ordered the silver service.

The man personating the groom, of course, was an accomplice, and the letter which Mr. James Green had penned for the pseudo Colonel James Green, was delivered by him to the jeweller's wife, who did not hesitate a minute to deliver to him the fifteen hundred pounds, because she recognised her husband's handwriting upon the paper stamped with the name of the jeweller's firm. Who the rogues were never came to light.

M. L.

GOLDEN ✱ STAR.

A Romance

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

PROLOGUE.

THE BRIDAL OF VILCAROYA AND GOLDEN STAR.

FAR and wide throughout the vast empire of the Incas had spread the momentous news of the coming of the mysterious strangers whose advent had been prophesied generation after generation from the remote ages in which Manco Capac and Mama Occlu, first Children of the Sun, had journeyed northward from the great lake of the south, bearing the golden wedge which, according to the divine promise, had sunk out of sight into the earth when they reached the northern end of the valley of Cuzco and so marked the site of the city which, in after ages, was to be the home of the Children of the Sun.

It was the eve of the great festival of the Raymi, that day on which the sun, rising from his grave in the north, greeted with golden promises of reborn splendour the eyes of his chosen children. The last sun of winter had set, and to-morrow the great feast would be held, and yet not held as of yore, as, indeed, it might never be held again, for the hearts of the Children of the Sun were heavy with the forebodings of evil times to come and the too well-grounded belief that, though on the morrow the sun might rise in all its accustomed splendour over the guardian mountains of Cuzco, and flood the glorious valley of gardens with the same rivers of light which for ages had flowed along its verdant shores, that other sun of empire which had shone undimmed in the zenith of power for twenty generations had already begun to decline towards the nadir from which it might never rise again.

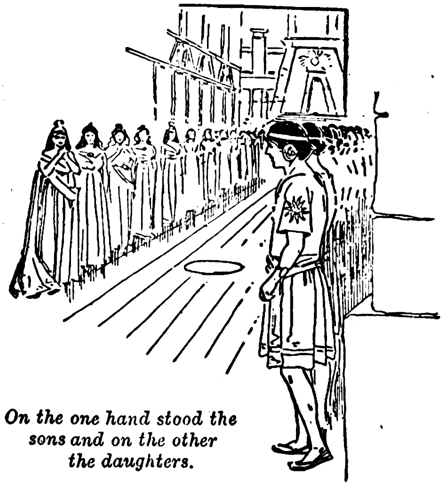
From all parts of the empire the worst of tidings had been fast flowing in through the four portals of the City of the Sun. News at once as mysterious as it was momentous. The air was full of forebodings, and men's hearts were failing them for fear of the things that were soon to come to pass. All over the great city, in the houses and the streets and the squares, groups of men and women were talking in the low tones of fearful apprehension of the wondrous things that had come to pass within the last few moons—things which no man had dreamed of, which no man had believed possible, so marvellous and unheard of were they. Was the end of all things coming? Was the golden dream of the Inca empire to end in the awakening of a grey morning of sorrow and strife, forerunner of the black darkness of a night of everlasting ruin?

Was the great dominion, which had been fashioned by the hands of the Celestials who had descended from the sun and had spread from beyond the southern shores of the great lake to the impassable mountains of the north, to wither away in the grasp of the mysterious beings who had come from beyond the portals of the sun? Were the long generations of uninterrupted conquest without and of unbroken peace and ever-growing prosperity within to end in the gloom of defeat and the chaos of irretrievable ruin?

All the portents foretold that it should be so, and the hearts of the Children of the Sun were heavy with the apprehension of coming sorrows. For three days the great city had fasted, neither fire nor light had been kindled within its precincts, and now the last hours of the fast had come. To-morrow the sun himself would tell them whether the portents were to be realised in very truth or whether those who had read them had erred in their reading.

The hour of midnight had long passed, the great central Sanctuary of the House of the Sun was filled with the descendants of his earliest children, who stood ranged in silent ranks along its two sides. On the one hand stood the sons and on the other the daughters of the sacred race, and above them, under the great golden cornice that ran round its walls, sat in twenty niches on either side facing each other, the mummies of the fathers and mothers of twenty generations of Incas looking down through the eyeholes of their golden masks upon this, the last gathering of their faithful children.

At the western end rose from a flight of broad, low steps, paved alternately with plates of gold and silver, the great Altar of the Sun—a huge block of black sienite, on which burnt the eternal fire fed every year with the sacred fleece kindled by the Sun himself without the aid of human hands. Above this was the great image of the Sun, a vast circular plate of gold fashioned in the form of a human face, with great diamonds for eyes, rubies for lips, with emerald pendants hanging from the ears, and all round it a halo of curving rays of gold thick-set with jewels that glittered each with its hundred rays of light in the rising and falling flame of the altar fire. In front of this, at the eastern end of the sanctuary, was a great circular window, through which the rays of the rising sun would fall, first upon its image over the altar, and then on the great golden vessel at the bottom of which lay the sacred fleece, which its concentrated rays should set on fire.



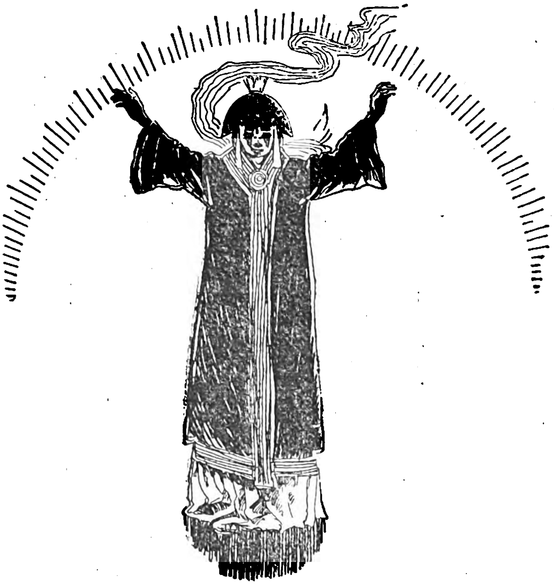
On the one hand stood the sons and on the other the daughters.

In front of the altar, on the highest step, stood Anda-Huillac, High Priest of the Sun, and brother of the great Huayni Capac, who had spread the empire of his ancestors from the deserts of Chili to Quito, the great city of the north, and from the Cordilleras of the east to the shoreless ocean of the west. The fourth hour of the morning had been called, and ere long the eastern sky would be brightened by the coming of the heralds of the dawn.

All lights, save the sacred altar fire, had been extinguished. For many minutes a breathless silence had reigned throughout the sanctuary, for the Villac Umu had been standing with his head bowed over the altar and his arms uplifted as though in supplication to the image of the Deity. At length his arms sank down until his hands were buried in the folds of his flowing robe. He turned round and faced the silent ranks on either side of him, with the flickering flames behind him outlining a figure full of weird and almost unearthly majesty.

Then he raised his arms again, at once in supplication to the Deity and in blessing on those who stood before him, and broke the long silence with an invocation to the Sun-God, in the concluding words of which the whole audience joined in a low, many-voiced whisper which sent its weird echoes murmuring among the niches where the dead Incas and their consorts sat, as though they were whispering in the ears that had so long been deaf to all earthly sounds. Then for a moment there was silence again, and then the Villac Umu spoke again:

"Children of the Sun, and sons and daughters of the long line of conquerors who, in the ages that are forgotten, received the divine command to create the empire over which your ancestors have ruled with ever-growing glory—to me, the last of my sacred line, has fallen by the inscrutable decrees of the Lord of the Universe, our common father, the Sun, the awful task of telling you that the day of our empire is past, and that the night of ruin is fast approaching."


Then he raised his arms again.

He paused for a moment, and from the ranks on either side of him there came a low murmuring wail, half of fear and half of wonder, for though the lips of the High Priest of the Sun were believed to voice the very thoughts of Deity itself, these tidings seemed to them too marvellous and too fearful for belief. He waited till the wail had died out into the silence again and then he went on:

"Yes, alas, it is too truly so, for the auguries, which cannot lie, have told the tale, and the voices of the stars themselves have confirmed it. When the great Inca Yupanqui heard the summons that called him home to the mansions of the Sun he foretold, speaking with the lore that is given to men only when they stand between the sunset of to-day and the dawn of to-morrow, in the midst of the brief passage which leads from this life to the next, that when the imperial Llautu should adorn the brow of two Incas in the Land of the Four Regions, and when the hostile hands of two brothers should grasp the sceptre of the divine Manco, there should come strangers from the north and the east armed with thunder and flame, and terrors unknown to the Children of the Sun, who, through the gateway opened by the strife of brothers, and the divisions of the people who were one, should march through fire and blood to a chaos of ruin and desolation in which all the long glories of the Incas should be buried.

"Now the eve of that day has come. You know how the sons of the great Huayni Capac, Huascar and Atahuallpa, have drenched the Land of the Sun with the blood of its children in their unholy strife for empire. You know how both have worn the Llautu, the one in the south and the other in the north, and how in the midst of their strife the strangers came, few in number but irresistible in might, and seized Atahuallpa in the midst of his conquering armies; how Huascar fell beneath the assassin's knife but a few days ago; and you know, too, how now this great City, with all its priceless treasures, lies open to the ravages of our conquerors."

Another wail broke, half stifled, from the trembling lips of his auditors. It sobbed itself away into silence among the echoes, and he went on, speaking now in a somewhat higher tone, through which sounded something like a note of hope:

"But yet one augury is wanting to make the prophecy complete. If when the hour of dawn comes our Lord and Father, the Sun, shall rise with his accustomed splendour and look through his portal yonder with a kindly eye upon us, his waiting children; if he shall greet us as of yore, and if the sacred fleece shall once more burst into flame under the burning light of his ardent eyes, then all hope is not lost, and the sorrows of to-day may melt away as the mists on the mountain tops dissolve ere the snowy peaks grow rosy red in the light of dawn. But if not, then the worst is certain, and so must be prepared for.

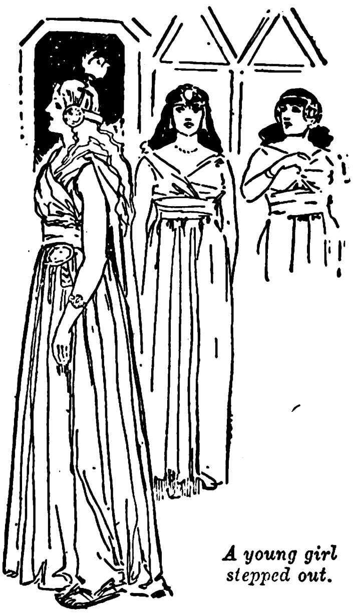
"But even then, though hope must die in the present, yet, as the stars have said, it may be revived in the future. For this the Golden Chain, the symbol of the unity of our empire and the image of that mystic bond which unites earth with heaven and the Sun with his children, must be saved from the polluting touch of the stranger and the oppressor, and with it must go into a place of secure hiding the best and greatest of those treasures of gold and silver and jewels, the report of whose priceless worth has lured these ruthless ravagers from afar.

"There they shall go, nay, many of them have already gone, under the care of my brethren and myself, to a place where none shall find them save those to whom we give the secret. But in the inscrutable wisdom of the powers that rule all human destiny, it has been ordained that only the hand of one who has been dead and shall be alive again shall draw them forth from their hiding-place. Only to such an one may be intrusted the secret of the hidden treasures, and with that secret the glorious task of restoring in another and perhaps distant age the ancient glories of the Children of the Sun.

"Now, who is he amongst you, if, indeed, there be one, who of his own free will will take this awful task upon himself—who will go through the gates of Death and dwell awhile in the shadowland that lies between this world and the Mansions of the Sun, who will take that dreadful secret with him into the grave, yet in the perfect faith and certain hope that some day he will come forth into the world of living men again, to perform the rest of the task which he has taken upon himself?"

He ceased speaking, and a long silence followed. In the pale flickering light of the altar flame, the Children of the Sun looked at each other wide-eyed in wonder at the strange words that they had heard, as though mutely asking which of them would undertake a task of which the first condition was death. Then from the ranks of the women a young girl stepped out, fair-skinned and golden-haired, with deep blue eyes that shone darkly in the light of the sacred fire as she approached it. She went to the foot of the altar steps, and, kneeling on the lowest of them, stretched out her arms above her head and said:

"O, priest of the Sun, and brother of His brother, thou hast asked if there is a man here who will dare and do this great and awful task of which thou hast told us, and I am but a girl who is hardly yet a woman. Yet the noblest of the sons of our divine race, aye, even the Inca Huascar himself, have sought in vain to win my favour. Now, I kneel here before the altar of the Sun and the sacred emblem of our ancient faith, and swear by it and the souls of our ancestors, who are looking down upon us, that with him who shall dare this thing I will wed in the chambers of Death and go down into the grave itself, well satisfied that in him the prophecy shall be fulfilled, and that when the awakening summons comes he and I will return to the halls of life, he to be the father, and I the mother, of those new children of the Sun in whom shall be restored the glories that are about to be taken from us."



A young girl stepped out.

Scarcely had the last words left her trembling lips than another figure sank on its knees beside her. Two other hands went up with hers, and the deep music of a man's voice uplifted to the pitch of ecstasy rang clearly through the gloom of the great sanctuary, and said:

"There is no death that the love of woman cannot conquer, nor any danger that shall not be dared to win such love as thine, O Golden Star! Lo! I will go with thee, for I love thee, and the grave hath no terrors if thou wilt go with me to its brink. Whether to wake again on earth or in the Mansions of the Sun, I will sleep the sleep of death with thee, and if it shall please our Father the Sun to recall us to mortal life in some other age, I swear by his glory to devote that new life to thy love and his service, and love and life and all that shall be mine to the restoration of the ancient glories of the Children of the Sun. Now I have sworn this for love of thee, O Golden Star, wilt thou accept my oath, and put thy hand in mine and be my bride in death and in the life that is to be?"

There was silence again for a little space, and then Golden Star's right hand stole out and found a resting-place in one stretched out to meet it. She turned her head for a moment and raised her eyes till they met those of the man kneeling beside her. A faint flush rose in her cheeks, and her lips parted in a smile as she answered:

"Yes, I will take thine oath and thy love, most willingly, O Vilcaroya, for there is no other of the sons of the Sun with whom I would so gladly go, whether to life or death, as with thee; and thou hast proved thyself worthy of the love that has been hidden until now, for thou alone of all here hast had the faith and boldness to believe the prophecy and venture all upon its truth. Thou art mine, and I am thine, for death or life, for the grave that is so near, and the empire that may be afar off."

"Well said, true son and daughter of our sacred race," said the Villac Umu, in solemn tones, spreading his hands out over them in blessing as they knelt before him, "for the lives that you give now, devoted to death in the faith and hope that shall not be betrayed, our Divine Father shall give you other lives better and brighter than those of to-day. You shall take the secrets of our doomed race, and the key to our most precious treasures into a place of safe keeping; and in the appointed time you shall bring them forth again, and through them in you, if you are but faithful to your trust, shall be restored the ancient splendours of the empire of the Children of the Sun. Now let your hearts and the hearts of all here melt and mingle in silence, for our Lord and Father approaches to make manifest his will unto his children."

As the priest ceased he pointed to the eastern window beyond which the sky was whitening and brightening with the swiftly coming dawn. Every face was turned towards it for an instant, then all with a single movement prostrated themselves on the floor of the sanctuary. Only the priest remained standing, and he stood on the lowest step between Golden Star and Vilcaroya with clasped hands and head thrown back, the fading glimmer of the altar behind him, and the fast growing light of the dawn falling on his pale upturned face and long silver hair.

Amidst utter silence the light brightened fast till a sun-ray shot over the lower rim of the window and shone on the golden rafters of the roof. Foot by foot it crept along the rooftree, broadening and brightening as it went, till it touched the western wall. Then, followed by the anxious eyes of the silent throng, it descended until the great Symbol of the sun flamed and flashed with new born radiance. Then the great polished golden concave, at the bottom of which lay the Sacred Fleece, began to glow with the concentrated rays, and the moment for the giving of the heaven-sent sign had come. Then something—cloud or mist or vapour drifting through the crystal air—passed over the face of the sun, and the glowing focus of rays in the golden concave grew dim for an instant. A faint wreath of pale-blue smoke curled round the Sacred Fleece and vanished.

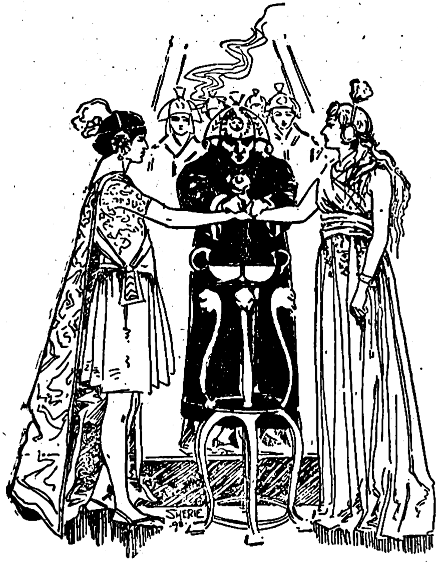
The haze passed away from the face of the sun, but the moment had gone by. The golden vessel grew dim as the rays left it one by one. A last sunbeam fell on the figure of the high priest and the heads of the pair that knelt before him. Then the sun's disc passed beyond the upper rim of the window. An oval shape of light swept slowly along the floor between the two prostrate files till it vanished like the symbol of the departing glory of the empire that was soon to be no more. The altar fire leapt upward once, then fell and flickered out. A wail of sorrow and despair broke from the pale lips of the Children of the Sun, and sobbed away into silence as Anda-Huillac threw his hands aloft again, and cried:

"The Sun himself hath spoken, and the doom of his children is certain. The Sacred Fleece lies cold, unkindled by the smile that has never been denied till now. The fire that was lit by celestial hands is quenched, and the last hour of the long empire of the Incas is struck. It is for us to save what may be saved, and then meet the fate assigned to us by our lord and father like true and faithful children submissive to his will. Rise now sons and daughters of the Sun, last heirs of our glories and first inheritors of our shame and sorrow! Bear witness to what has been said and done this night; and you Vilcaroya and Golden Star make ready to fulfil the oath that you have sworn, and to take your sacred charge through the shadows that are already gathering on the brink of your common grave from which, if the Divine Powers permit, you shall come forth again to life and love and glory, and the gloom that is falling upon the Land of the Sun shall have passed away in the dawn of a brighter age!"

As he ceased speaking he descended from the altar steps, and with down-bent head and hands crossed on his breast, walked with slow steps down between the silent files towards the eastern door of the sanctuary, followed by Golden Star and Vilcaroya hand in hand. Then, two and two, the bright-haired Virgins of the Sun filed out after them, and after these went in the same order the sons of the Sun, the flower of the Inca manhood, leaving the sanctuary cold and dark and deserted, with the ashes of the sacred fire lying cold upon the altar of a dying faith.

The feast of Raymi passed in gloom and silence only broken by the low wailings of mourners bemoaning the gloomy portents of the speedy fulfilment of which there seemed now to be no possible doubt. The Sun, their father and their god had veiled his face at the very moment when they looked most eagerly and anxiously for the kindly glance which was to promise light and life, and peace for yet another year

All that day Golden Star and Vilcaroya fasted and prayed in preparation for the solemn ordeal that awaited them at night, and at sunset the Villac Umu took them back into the sanctuary and there in the presence of a great gathering of the priests of the Sun they repeated their oaths and plighted their death-troth once more. Then two priests brought out the marriage-font and placed it between them as they stood before the altar. It was a double vessel of gold composed of two shallow cups divided by a partition which was pierced by a single hole. The cup on Vilcaroya's side was filled with a deep blood-red liquid, and the one towards Golden Star with crystal clear water. The hole in the partition was stopped with a golden plug to which was attached a little chain. The high priest joined their hands over the mystic vessel and drew out the plug. Immediately the two liquids began to mingle, and as they did so, the priest said in a low clear voice:

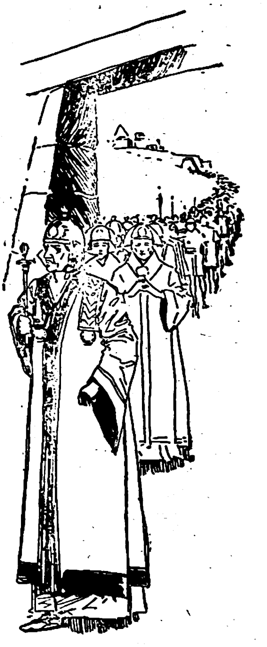


The high priest joined their hands over the vessel.

"Here Vilcaroya and Golden Star, son and daughter of the Sun, see the emblem of the solemn union between you. As the strong red wine tinges and strengthens the pure water, so, Golden Star, shall the stronger nature of thy husband colour and strengthen thine, and as the pure water tempers and purifies the ruddy wine, so, Vilcaroya, shall the gentler and purer nature of her who is now thy wife soften and purify thine, according to the will and purpose of our Father the Sun, who to this end sent man and woman upon the earth, that together they might possess and enjoy it, each helping the other, man making the earth fruitful and beautiful by his labour, and woman sweetening his toil by the reward of her love and constancy."

Still holding their clasped hands over the mingling fluids, symbol of their now united lives, the wedded lovers who had known each other's love but for a day, heard the priests chant the marriage song, and then with blanching cheeks and suddenly aching hearts heard the cheerful strains change into the mournful cadences of the dirge for the dead. When these died away the high priest took the golden vase from the altar. Still with clasped hands they turned and faced him. He held it before them, and said, in a voice at length shaken by the strength of his emotion:

"Son and daughter, man and wife, who have sworn to lead each other through the shadows, whose eyes must soon close on the untasted joys of your most holy union perchance to open upon the things of a better and a brighter age—this is the draught of death which yet may not be death for you. Drink it in the fulfilment of your oaths and in pledge of the faith you have professed in the truth of the prophecy and of the loving mercy of your father the Sun."



First went the Villac Umu and the twelve priests.

He gave the vase to Vilcaroya, who raised it to his lips with unshaking hand and drank half of the pale golden fluid that it contained. Then he gave it to Golden Star, but now his hands trembled and he saw her take it and drain it with eyes that looked through a mist of tears. Then the high priest took the empty goblet in silence and laid it on the altar, and then hand in hand the bride and bridegroom of death were led by the Villac Umu and the twelve chief priests of the Sun to the bridal couch that had been prepared for them in an inner chamber of the sanctuary.

There they lay down side by side in their splendid bridal robes, and the priests standing round began to chant the marriage song again, but this time in the slow and slumberous cadences of the death chant. When the song ere long had died away in silence Vilcaroya and Golden Star lay with closed eyes and gently heaving breasts, sleeping the long sleep which, unless a miracle was wrought, should for them know no waking.

At midnight a long procession moved silently and swiftly out of the western gate of the City of the Sun. First went the Villac Umu and the twelve priests, then came two closed litters each borne by eight bearers, and each containing a recumbent, motionless form. After these came a long line of men walking about six feet apart, and over their shoulders, right and left alternately, lay what looked like a huge rope wrapped in folds of woollen cloth. Yet it could hardly have been a rope, for it hung down too heavily and swung too regularly between the bearers, and when every now and then others stepped in from the two files and walked alongside to relieve them there was a sound of metal clinking musically upon metal.

The procession left the city amidst the tears and prayers of a silent multitude of the Children of the Sun, and filed out into the plain towards the western mountains, and was lost in the darkness. Ten days later the Villac Umu and the twelve chief priests returned. The litters and the long, strange burden and all their bearers had vanished, nor were any of them ever seen again by the eyes of that generation of the Children of the Sun.

(*End of the Prologue.*)

A LITERARY ASPIRANT

One of the leading lights of a certain small country parish in Virginia was the zealous young man rejoicing in the name of the Rev. Josiah Meeking, who presided over the local chapel and looked upon himself as responsible for the moral principles of his congregation.

In addition to being a zealous worker he was not without his ambitions, one of them being to shine in the ranks of literature. Possibly the fact that his salary was small and he had heard that there was money to be made by writing stories, may have had something to do with his desire to become an author.

His fate—he persuaded himself—lay in the direction of stories having a moral attached to them, and for a long time he racked his brains for a suitable plot in which the hero, after being subjected to all sorts of trials and temptations, emerged triumphant in the end and became a noted character for the rest of his life.

Somehow the idea didn't work out as he could have wished. Whenever he had thought of a really good plot, it occurred to him that he had heard or read something very much like it before, and reference to the selection of volumes comprising the parish library generally proved his surmise to have been correct.

By continual reference in this way he became intimately associated with the titles of nearly every story in the library, and he was surprised to find what a number had to do with boys and girls—were written apparently for their sole edification and benefit, further than this there was a marvellous sameness about them when compared with each other, one of the most favourite themes being a wolf story, the scene of which was, he observed, almost always laid in Russia.

Here was an opportunity; he would write a wolf story, but change the venue to his own district, and make his hero one of his own countrymen.

The next thing to be done was to get the nucleus of a plot, something new and original, but at the same time working in the old familiar details.

Quite by chance one day, he noticed an advertisement of a book entitled, "How to Write a Story," and promptly sent for a copy. When he received it he imagined his difficulties were practically at an end, but after reading it through carefully he felt bound to confess that he was not much nearer his goal than before.

The little work, excellent in its way, afforded no end of hints to would-be writers of fiction as to how they should commence, develop, and finish off a story; but what the Rev. Josiah needed was a plot, and this simple matter of detail strange as it may appear had apparently been deemed unworthy of the writer's notice. There was, however, one gleam of hope; in the appendix was the following suggestion: "Young authors will often find the means of inspiration for literary efforts by perusing the daily newspapers. Many an excellent plot may by this means be evolved."

The Rev. Josiah once more hied him to the parish reading-room and anxiously scanned the contents of every paper he could lay his hands upon. For a while he worked in vain, and then his eye lighted on a short paragraph narrating that a man, recently deceased, who had in his time fought for his country, was wont to narrate how in one battle in which he was engaged, he was struck by an enemy's bullet, and that his life was saved from the fact that he had always made it a practice, in addition to his ordinary military equipment, to carry a Testament in the left breast of his tunic; and the bullet, which he ever after retained as a memento of his marvellous escape, found its progress to his heart, or somewhere thereabouts, arrested by this shield of protection, to which he owed his life.

Here was a suggestion at last; he would make his hero—an eminently good young man—go through life with a prayer-book somewhere about him. He could not very well always have it in his pocket, as wolves did not usually go for a man's pocket, he fancied, but for the throat of their victims—at least, all the stories he had read attributed this proceeding to them.

Obviously his hero could not go about the world with a prayer-book, like a charm, hung around his neck; and for a brief while the incompatibility of the thing staggered him.

Suddenly an inspiration struck him, and he wondered why he had not thought of it before; he would make his hero carry his prayer-book, not too bulky a one, in his outside coat tail pocket and then when the pursuing wolf had gained upon him, and was just about to make his fatal spring, he would valiantly face him, holding his shield of protection in front of his throat.

The brute would spring and find his teeth embedded in the book. It was to have limp leather covers as being more likely to serve his purpose than the board ones which turned the bullet, and in case this meal of literature was not sufficient, his hero, an exemplary young man, should have his various pockets well filled with religious books and tracts of a bulky and satisfying nature so that if the prayer-book failed to effect its object in the way of warding off the wolf's attack, there would be a reserve of ammunition as it were to hurl at him, until at length mad with rage and impotence at being unable to reach his victim's throat, the wolf would desist. Great stress it will be observed was to be placed on the exact portion of the human anatomy to be attacked.

Having at length worked out the incidents of the plot to his entire satisfaction, the Rev. Josiah Meeking retired to rest, well satisfied in his mind, and with a secret inward conviction that the gates of fame were about to open to him, and that a comfortable addition to his small stipend might reasonably be looked for in the immediate future.

The hero, a man of small stature, but indomitable courage, was to be a young clergyman living near the banks of a large lake in a wild and sparsely populated district; in addition to his own parish he had occasionally to do duty in another some miles distant, and in winter time, the whole surface of the vast lake being frozen over, he would be in the habit of making the journey between the two places on skates. It was to be in one of these expeditions, when returning at night after taking an afternoon service, that the terrific encounter between man and wolf was to be brought about.

The story was to read something like this:

The whole surface of the vast watery expanse was as smooth as glass, a few clouds drifted in the blue sky overhead, but the Rev. Abraham Smirke noted them not, for, as he sped on his homeward way, conscious of having done a good day's work, his thoughts were busily centred in the all-absorbing problem of his life, how he was to raise the necessary funds for building the new church of which his rapidly increasing flock was sadly in need.

Even while his mind was thus busily engaged, his thoughts were divided as it were, and being an expert skater, and withal possessed of excellent eyesight, he read as he sped along out of a theological work, one of several, in addition to a whole bundle of tracts which it was his custom to carry about with him in his daily peregrinations. For be it understood the Rev. Smirke was regarded by all who knew him as an exemplary young man in every respect, and no one in his community had ever dared to say so much as a word against him.

By degrees the light failed, and, realising that he had yet many miles to traverse before he would be in sight of his humble lodging, he, not without a sigh, placed in his outside overcoat pocket the work he had been reading—"Holy Living"—and set to vigorously to accomplish the remainder of the journey before nightfall. For had it not been rumoured that owing to the severity of the winter wolves from the adjoining woods had latterly become so emboldened as to leave the security of their retreats and approach the confines of civilisation.

Ha! what was that? a low ominous howl arrested his attention, and as he turned his head without for a moment relaxing his efforts to keep up the speed he was travelling at, he saw following immediately in his track an enormous wolf which he judged could not be more than a quarter of a mile distant. Full seven miles off was the the house he lived in, but before that there was a small tavern, and if he could only reach it before the wolf he would be saved. Fear lent energy to his legs, and his skates rang out as they skimmed over the frozen surface in a way they had never done before. He looked back; the wolf was unmistakably gaining on him, and he could see the open mouth and cruel hungry fangs waiting as it seemed to devour him.

For the first time in his life, the habit he had of carrying a small library of religious works about with him, weighed upon his mind, or, to be more correct, upon his body, the "Holy Living" in his overcoat pocket especially making its presence uncomfortably felt by banging about against his legs.

For a moment the thought entered his mind to throw it away, but almost instantly he repented of having allowed such an idea to even temporarily take possession of him, and he sped on, encumbered though he was.

On came the wolf, with that long galloping stride (for description of how wolves do gallop when pursuing belated travellers *vide* any popular story-book) and was evidently gaining on his victim, yard by yard. To make matters worse for the reverend gentleman a stiff breeze had lately sprung up—a side wind, too—which not only made progression more difficult, but also caused the various volumes in his different pockets to wobble about and flap against his legs more than ever.

The temptation to discard "Holy Living" again made itself felt, and he is on the point of throwing it from him in the hopes that it may, momentarily at all events, serve to distract the wolves attention, when he sees before him at no great distance a long slender black object lying on the ice. "Thank Heaven!" he ejaculates to himself, "it must be a gun, or failing that a stout staff. If I can but gain it my life may yet be spared." He has almost come up with it when the wolf makes a mighty spring, not at the horrified man's throat, as had been the writer's intention, it will be remembered, but at the nearest spot available, which happened to be the outflying coat-tail in the pocket of which reposed "Holy Living."

There is a sound as of a mighty tear, the coat—excellent material as it was—(the author had felt half inclined to work in an advertisement here, but on reflection came to the conclusion it would detract from the otherwise highly moral tone of the story) the coat as has been said, unable to stand the strain, gave way; the lower portion of the garment, including the good book, remaining embedded in the wolf's hungry and capacious maw. Mr. Smirke, released by the sudden severance, fell forwards on his face and immediately on top of the dark object already referred to, which, with wondrous presence of mind, he managed to secure. It proves to be a stout oaken stave. Armed with this, and with the powerful consciousness of having resisted temptation at a time of direst extremity, he turns to face his foe, with that undaunted courage which had ever been one of his main characteristics.

The wolf is sprawling on the ice, panting convulsively at the air. His fangs had closed over the overcoat just where "Holy Living" was reposing in the tail pocket, and thus having become embedded in that excellent, but somewhat weighty volume, he was powerless to make any further attack. With a single blow of the trusty oak, Mr. Smirke puts him *hors de combat*, and heartily congratulates himself on not having yielded to temptation at what had, he felt, been one of the most trying moments of his life.

Finally, he earned the gratitude of his community by killing the ferocious beast, to say nothing of the pecuniary reward from the State for so doing.

Such in brief was the outline—omitting the abundant supply of padding—of the Rev. Josiah Meeking's first effort at literary composition.

It was, he felt, little short of sublime, the moral it taught being sufficient to insure its acceptance at the hands of the editor of a certain religious weekly publication to whose care he lost no time in consigning it.

Now, as often happens, the publishing offices of the paper in question were also those of a periodical of an altogether different type, the contributors to which were not altogether renowned for their piety, but rather the reverse—a decidedly worldly paper, in fact—and one whose sole aim and desire was to excite risibility in its readers, rather than convey a moral to adorn a tale.

And it chanced that by some unaccountable blunder Mr. Smirke's MS. found itself on the editorial table of the humorous publication, instead of the religious one for which it was intended.

In due course it was opened and read, the address on the cover not being noticed, and before the editor had proceeded far, he saw that it was not quite the sort of story for his journal, but he smiled to himself as he read on, and the idea suggested itself to him that with a little careful revision it might be made to do duty exceedingly well.

A few days later the Rev. Mr. Smirke was no less surprised than gratified to receive a notification that his story was accepted, and would appear in due course. Meanwhile, in accordance with the rule, payment was forwarded; a cheque for a guinea and a half—exactly a guinea more than Mr. Smirke had dared to hope for—was inclosed.

Weeks passed by, and although Mr. Smirke had contemplated writing a second story, he had not done so, being desirous to see how his first venture would be criticised.

One day he received a copy of the *Humorous Joker!* Mechanically tearing it open, what was his surprise to find *his* story occupying a prominent position in its pages.

He could hardly believe his eyes, but there it was right enough, and if anything were necessary to convince him it was the fact that the opening sentences, on which he had particularly prided himself, were left exactly as he had written them, a piece of discernment on the editor's part for which he felt highly gratified, and resolved to write and tell him so. But as he went on his face changed, as well it might; for if the editor had been content to leave the opening part alone, he had taken most unwarrantable liberties with the action of the plot in its most exciting episodes. This is what he read:

"On came the wolves" (wolves, indeed! he had only described one wolf!), "their mouths gaping wide open as they viewed with avidity the literary treat in store for them, for, in addition to his usual impedimenta in the way of clothing, including a long overcoat, the Rev. Jonas Sleeke had loaded himself with a small library of religious books, not necessary to be read so much as a profession of the faith that was within him. Tracts, missionary reports, and the rest, all served to swell his pockets, and at the same time retard his progress.

"Still he kept resolutely on, and the temptation which assailed him to throw some of his cargo away, in the hopes of distracting the wolves' attention—our readers will remember something of this sort has been worked into a story before: then it was a bad Russian woman who threw her children one by one (she seems to have had a large family) to ward off the wolves' attack from herself; but we let this pass—the thought occurred, we remark, to Mr. Sleeke to attempt to distract the wolves' attention by tract distribution, at which he had always been proficient, but he immediately put it from him; arguing that it would be wrong to waste upon brute beast what had been the means of gaining him a character for piety and devotion; and further, he thought to himself, with a chuckle, that if the wolves continued to keep their mouths open much longer in the face of the keen wind that was blowing, added to the fact of the thermometer being several degrees below zero, they would in all probability be unable to close them again, as they would be frozen open! And then being incapable of attacking him they would fall an easy victim to his prowess, and better still he would obtain a satisfactory pecuniary reward from the State for the destruction of each one.

"Buoyed up with this pleasant vision, he urges on his wild career, notwithstanding that his movements are sadly hampered by his load of goody goody literature; but still he perseveres, for it would never do, after years of exemplary conduct, to throw away his credentials as it were.

"In front of him he sees something—what it is he knows not—it may be a gun, possibly a big German sausage—whatever it is he will strive to reach it, and he does. At last he is almost upon it, when the three foremost of the pack of wolves, as if actuated by one common impulse, make a mighty spring at him. One seizes his overcoat by the left tail, the other by the right, and the third goes for the centre of the skirt. One and all succeed in getting a firm hold, and there is a tearing sound which results in the garment giving way. Mr. Sleeke falls forward upon the black object, which is not a gun or a sausage, but a stout ebony cane, since we understand identified as belonging to a member of Mr. Sleeke's congregation. But how it came to be upon the ice in that particular spot, unless the worthy member had been paying a surreptitious visit to a certain tavern in the neighbourhood, and had dropped it on his way home, we are unable to say.

"At any rate there it was, and armed therewith and using it as a ramrod, Mr. Sleeke felt safe—for are not the wolves rolling on their backs, convulsively pawing at the air? The literary feast had disagreed with them, one and all. They had got their teeth embedded either in a good book, a missionary report, or a tract, and they were powerless to attack the pale but resolute man in front of them. The remainder of the pack, true to the traditions of their species, when they saw the leaders in difficulties had slunk away, leaving their companions to their fate.

"And what did Mr. Sleeke do? Did he hesitate? No! A thousand times, no! Endowed with that indomitable courage which had ever been one of his chief characteristics, and realising, probably, that the rapidly suffocating animals could not possibly do him any injury, he hastily took a bundle of remaining tracts from one pocket, and using his trusty stick as a rammer, proceeded to load the throat of wolf number one until he succumbed; and then performed the same humane operation to numbers two and three.

"And as he looked at his three vanquished and now defunct foes, and realised the good deed he had done, and the prospective reward in store for him from a grateful State, he felt a glow of satisfaction, and a feeling of deep gratitude almost overpowered him at the thought that in his direst extremities he had not given way to temptation.

"It is said, but we decline to believe it without convincing proof, that Mr. Sleeke so far forgot what was due to him as a Christian minister as to visit the neighbouring tavern and partake of certain alcoholic refreshment, his excuse being that the terrible ordeal he had undergone had completely unnerved him!"

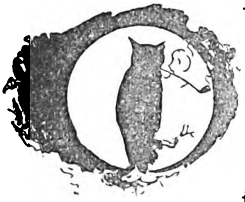
* * * * *

At a meeting of the Rev. Josiah Meeking's flock shortly afterwards held, it was pointed out to him by an elder that admirable as might be the desire to seek fame and obtain emolument by the narration of fiction, it was not becoming in the person of a Christian minister to make mock of religion, and he was kindly invited to tender his resignation.

His next story will probably be of a different type.

S. J. F. Newbery.

The People Across The Way



OUT of a full heart I tell this story.

The haunted house across the way was once a country residence, standing amid lawns and gardens and orchards and green fields, with a little village at its gate. But in time the village grew and encompassed it about and hemmed it in and swallowed up the orchards and green fields, and encroached upon the lawns and gardens, till of the broad lands there remained only a few scant acres. About these the owner built a high brick wall with a wicket gate, and then he died.

Those who came after chose to live elsewhere, and the house, which in days gone by had been a jolly house, became haunted from being untenanted. Years passed.

A rumour went abroad—the haunted house was rented at last. And the rumour was verified; for late one evening in early March, a closed carriage pulled up at the wicket gate, two female forms in black, closely veiled and followed by a woolly dog, stepped out, and the wicket gate closed on them. Upon inquiry I learnt that these were Mrs. and Miss Durand, French women of unknown antecedents, whose reasons for coming to Hallowell were, as yet, a mystery.

Strangers never came to Hallowell, as there was nothing in the town to attract them—neither the idler, the invalid, nor the artist; therefore the advent of madame and mademoiselle, as they came to be called, created something of a sensation. But it happened that only I and old Peggy, their cook, could bear witness to their life.

I was an idle fellow, with plenty of time and a good field-glass, and my window overlooked the high brick wall; therefore I soon learnt something of my neighbours. Madame was tall, of full figure, and had lost a tooth; further than this I took no immediate note; but mademoiselle—her mother called her Antoinette—was charming, beautiful! Her eyes were green like olives; her hair was red like sienna-tinted marsh grass in November; her skin resembled thick cream—as fine of texture and as colourless; and from the fact that there was a hint of that wondering youthfulness which the world wipes so soon from a woman's face, as a rude hand wipes the dust from a butterfly's wing, I guessed that she was not yet twenty. For the rest, her form, her voice, the grace of her body, her clothes—which, nevertheless, were very simple—and the way she wore them, were beyond the reach of pen and tongue.

Madame was a most devoted mother, mademoiselle a loving daughter. Madame was sometimes sad, mademoiselle was always gay. Both were industrious. Mademoiselle did the housekeeping, marketing, and shopping; madame affected gardening. Under her hand the scant acres blossomed as the rose; and so fascinated was she with her work that she never went abroad, except on occasional jaunts in the country with her daughter, whence they returned at twilight, laden with sweet spring flowers. At night they sat together in the porch, and mademoiselle, her head on madame's knee, sang *chansonettes* to a mandolin. Their life seemed to me most happy, innocent, and sweet.

And yet, since they went to no church, since—as told by Peggy, a prying gossip!—the hair of mademoiselle was made red by champagne, and—as told by Peggy, but denied by me—they drank much wine, and, oh, horror of horrors! smoked cigarettes after their late dinner, they were blackballed by the tradesmen's wives of Hallowell. But they were not altogether friendless. Mademoiselle gathered the little ragged children of the town, and held her *salon* in the sunny garden. Often have I watched her frolic with them in the mild spring weather, and sing to them, and tell them stories on the grass, under overhanging fruit trees which rained down scented petals on their heads.

But one day I discovered that life was not all sunshine for my charming mademoiselle. In a certain little wood near town, where flowers grow in wild luxuriance, and chestnut trees and oaks lift their long arms to the sky, I loved to wander with my dogs and books on pleasant Sunday mornings when all the world was on its knees in prayer. One day I came upon a woman sitting on a fallen tree and weeping, her white hands pressed against her face. In her lap was a bunch of wild azaleas, at her feet a woolly dog. Since there was no one in the world like her, I recognised mademoiselle.

Is there a man who understands the great mobility of a woman's nature? An hour later she arranged her azaleas on a little breakfast table in the garden. Her eyes glowed, her teeth gleamed through her parted lips—she was telling a good story to madame.

"Ah!" thought I, "there is a secret sorrow, and you take it to the wood, my pretty lady, that your mother may not see your tears!" I look back now and smile at my conclusion. Alas! some smiles are more bitter than tears!

I was a student and a dreamer, with a few thousands and no ambition. I was small, freckled, and insignificant in appearance, and—lacking the will to please my own sex, and the art to please the other—lived the life of any recluse, with my books, my flute, and my dog for company. I will not deny that, as time passed, I fell in love with mademoiselle, as needs must any man, indeed, who had peeped at her through a shutter's chink at intervals during one long season. When she wrapped her veil about her—she never went abroad without her veil—and tripped along the garden path and through the wicket gate, I seized my hat and followed after; when I passed her in the street I raised my hat, as is the custom of the town.

One day I met her in a grocer's shop. She was buying sausages, cheese, and other commonplace things. I was pretending to examine a box of cigars.

"You will send my basket at once, Mr. Brown?" she said, and turned to go.

The grocer scratched his head—it gave him pain to disoblige a customer—and explained, that since his boy was out, he feared it would be impossible.

Mademoiselle frowned slightly, and I, recognising my opportunity, came forward and said, with many blushes: "I hope you will excuse me, my name is Adams. I do not wish to presume, but, since we go in the same direction, may I take your basket?"

She wavered. "I fear the basket might be heavy."

For answer I swung it from the counter, then stepped aside that she might precede me to the street.

And so we took our first walk together. There was no awkwardness in the situation. Her unaffected manner relieved me of all embarrassment; her conversation cleared my brain like a draught of wine. I thought her as witty as she was lovely and innocent.

After this, when we met in the street she smiled, and sometimes stopped to give me a word upon a topic of passing interest. But our friendship was not consummated until one day when the woolly dog was lost and I restored him to her arms. It was in June, and she stood at the wicket gate and wrung her hands, while her friends, the little children, clung to her in sympathy.

"Bijou! My little dog! He is lost!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Adams, have you seen him?"

I had not, but assured her that if he lived she should have him in an hour. And I made my assurance good.

Her pleasure in the wanderer's return and my share in it would have been reward enough for me had there not been a better one in store.

She folded Bijou to her breast and raised her grateful eyes to mine. "Oh, sir! is there anything—anything that I can do for you?"

I was discreet in my reply. "A young girl whom I know will be married to-night. There is a scarcity of flowers——" I began.

"Flowers!" she interrupted. "We have many, and you shall have them all! Come! Let us gather them at once," and she invited me to enter at the wicket gate.

Madame was in her garden, knee-deep in sweet peas. Mademoiselle bade me wait and ran to her; then, after a minute or two, beckoned me to approach.

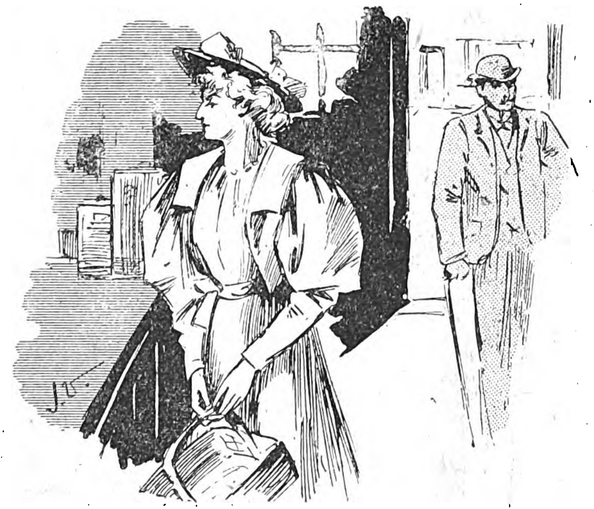
"Mamma," said she, "this is Mr. Adams, the gentleman who plays upon the flute, and who has just restored my little Bijou. I have promised him some flowers!"

Madame muttered some unintelligible French and offered a lean hand in a mitten of black silk.

"Mamma is grateful to the circumstance that has given her this great pleasure. Mamma does not speak your language, though she understands it perfectly," said mademoiselle.

We gathered a basketful of flowers, mademoiselle and I, and agreed that we loved them better than anything in the world, except poetry and music—yes; and children and all the helpless creatures. Madame took no part in this; she had returned to her garden.

"*Au revoir*," said I at last; "or must it be good-bye?"



"You will send my basket at once, Mr. Brown?"

We were standing at the gate. She had suddenly grown silent, and her pretty fingers tore a rose to bits.

"May I speak to you as to a friend?" she said, and turned her eyes to mine. "Ah, sir, we are two lonely women, removed from our country and our friends! In France we were gay; here this life wearies us. For me it does not matter—I am young. But each day I watch her and I believe she pines for human fellowship. She is a Parisienne and gay by nature, though suffering and loneliness have made her sad. During many nights we have listened while you played the arias we loved upon your flute, which seemed to us like the voices of friends from over the wide sea, and often she has said to me: 'Monsieur is sympathetic and he is alone, *comme nous*.'" Then with a sudden change of manner and a shrug, "Do I offend the good taste of provincial society, or presume upon the accidental acquaintance if I ask you to come sometimes and cheer us in our exile?"

The next evening I made a careful toilette and my first call at the haunted house. It was a delightful call, and the next night but one I made another. In passing, I must admit that, as regards two things, old Peggy had reported truly. No sensible man will cavil at wine in moderation, but a cigarette between the lips of the woman he loves is a different matter altogether. One evening I made an unexpected call, and seeing, as I thought, a glow-worm in the grass, stopped to find a half-smoked cigarette. Both ladies were in the porch. Mademoiselle burst into a merry laugh.

"Monsieur is shocked!" she cried. Then more seriously, "Ah, monsieur, you in this country here are selfish, cruel. You refuse to women, who are too weak to bear the burden of life, the comforter that you will not deny yourselves. Men are more generous in France." Then she took three cigarettes from a silver case and lighted one for madame, another for me, and the third for herself.

I smoked the cigarette and shortened my call. But love does not die with such as this. In a week I was more in love than ever.

Except that mademoiselle looked pale and almost old sometimes, and sometimes madame was sad and again hilariously gay, and that their wine bill, as I learnt from their merchant, was the largest in town, the summer passed without event.

One evening in September, as I sat at my window and watched the animated shadows on the blinds across the way, a loud and sudden scream froze the blood within my heart.

I rushed downstairs and out into the street, meeting Peggy at the wicket gate.

"What is the matter, woman?" I cried, and grabbed her arm.

"Matter? Why, it's the old lady who is drunk again. And when she's drunk, sir, she's dangerous; so I came out, and wild horses won't git me back again to-night."

"Dangerous! Drunk! What do you mean?"

"You heard that scream, sir. Well she tried to blow her brains out——"

In a moment I was through the gate and beating fiercely at the knocker. No one came, and since the front door had been left ajar, I opened it and entered the dark hall.

The parlour door stood open. Within there was a brilliant light, by which I saw madame with her face bowed in her hands, as though abandoned to despair. She was seated, and by her side, close to her heart, knelt mademoiselle, whose sobs alone disturbed the silence.

I stole away on tiptoe.

"Go back," I said to Peggy, who stood shivering at the gate. "There is no danger."

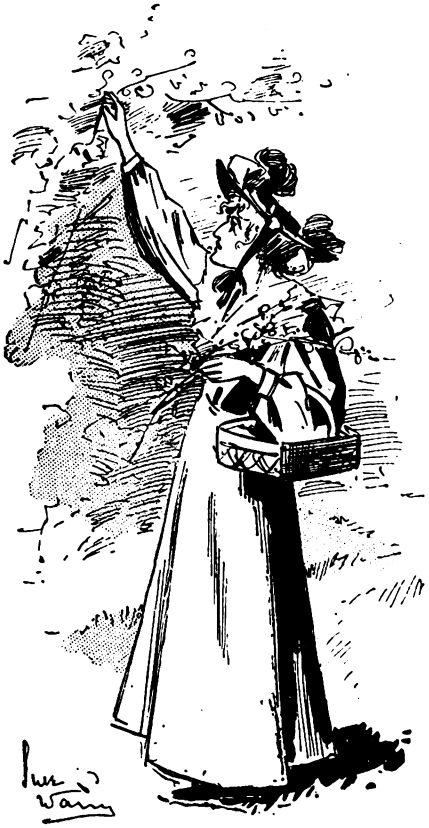
And so the mother of the girl I loved was one of the most contemptible of living creatures—a drunken woman!

I understood it all—the gloom, the wild hilarity, the young girl's paleness, and her effort to be gay while hiding from the world's cold eye. After a troubled night I resolved to tell her that I knew her secret, to warn her of her danger, and to implore her to become my wife. Since I rarely saw her for any length of time alone, it was a month before there occurred an opportunity to execute my resolution.

One afternoon I found her standing at the wicket gate. Her dress was black, and a picturesque black hat was tied under her round chin. She had a basket on her arm, and some children were clinging to her skirts, while Bijou barked and capered in anticipation of an outing.

"We go for chestnuts. Come with us!" she called to me.

It was a still October afternoon. The fields were brown, and purple mists hung on the horizon, sobering the gay colouring of the distant trees. The woods were at their best—more beautiful by far than they had been in spring. Dropping chestnuts sounded pleasant to our ears; squirrels peeped at us coquettishly from their fastness in hollow trees; sunbeams sifted down upon us through the golden leaves.



Stopped to reach a maple branch above her head.

The children ran on in advance, and mademoiselle, whose arms were already full of flaming foliage, stopped to reach a maple branch above her head. Her wondrous beauty, the singular grace of her posture, and the contrast of her black gown upon the sunlit yellow background wrung from me a cry of admiration.

"Lazy fellow! Why do you not climb the chestnut tree?" she asked.

"Leave that to the children," I replied, "let me stay with you." She smiled and I hurried on impetuously: "Ah! mademoiselle, I am only a man and do not know the art of putting a plain truth so that it may not offend. Forgive me, I have thought the matter over during many wakeful nights, and believe me it is my duty to warn you of your danger."

Her face grew white, her breath came in short gasps as though exhausted by a sudden fear.

"I know your secret," I went on.

"What do you mean?" She made a mighty effort to be calm.

"I mean that you are a noble daughter, but, at the same time, ill-advised. Forgive me—I do not know how to say it—but your mother—is it well to put temptation in her way?—the wine, you know!"

She gave me one strange glance and turned away her head. She pressed her hands against her face and her shoulders shook with violent emotion. When she looked at me again her eyes were solemn and full of tears, her cheeks were crimson and bore the imprint of her fingers, and there was a twitching about the dimpled corners of her mouth that puzzled me.

She laid her hand upon her heart. "Ah! I have suffered so much, and all alone! But what is it that you wish to say to me?"

"I wish to say that there are places where the habit can be cured——"

She shook her head. "The great physicians of your country tell me that her case is hopeless. But sit down by me on this log, my friend, and I will tell you all." She paused a moment, then began:

"My father was killed at Paris and left us destitute, without a sou! She was a woman who knew only the gay life of a Parisienne; I was a child. We arrived in London, and starvation stared us in the face. However, she had learned to make embroidery, and through the kindness of some good people, was engaged to work on the trousseau of a young lady of position. Afterwards she obtained other work, but, oh! it was a cruel life for one who had lived as she had lived; and if she sought the means to make herself forget, we must give her our pity and our prayers. In a year or two my uncle died and left us his small fortune, and I have brought her to this quiet place that the world may not know our shame. That is our story." She paused and watched the children play with their fallen leaves. "Do you know why I love those children and my little dog so tenderly?" she said. "I will tell you. It is because they love and trust me though they cannot read my heart, and would love and trust me still though all the world cried out against me. Can I say as much for you, monsieur?"

"There is no need to ask."

She searched my face with her inscrutable green eyes. "Yes, I believe you are a friend."

"And since I am a friend it is my duty to advise. Will you hear me?"

"Not if you would part us; she would die away from me, and I have not the courage to fight the world alone."

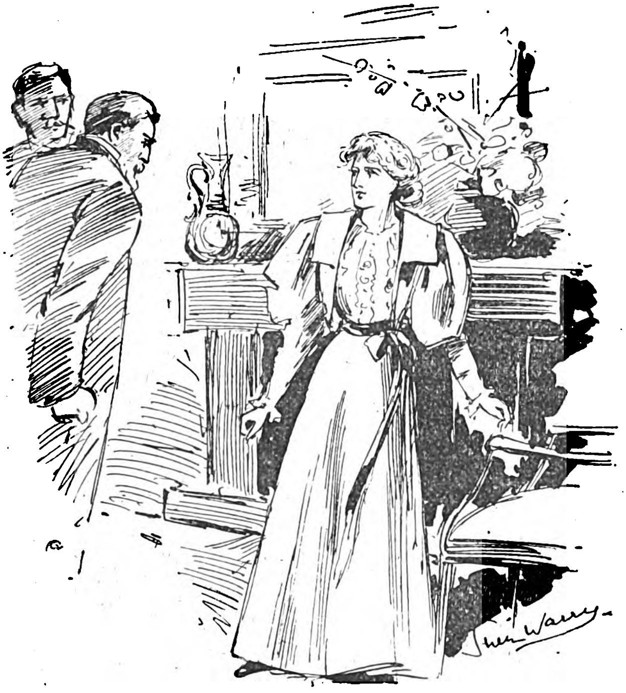
"I will fight it for you. Be my wife."

The deep, mysterious look of Mona Lisa crossed her face. It seemed that in her heart she laughed at me while striving to be pitiful.

"You are good and true, my friend," she said, "and I bless you for your kindness; but it cannot be. You have guessed one secret. I have yet another. There is some one else whom I loved during many years, and who is more to me than the salvation of my soul. Ah! would that we were dead, my love and I."

There was a long silence.

"And you have given him up for this?" cried at last.



Instantly mademoiselle was on her feet.

She laid a finger on her lip. "Hush! I have told you nothing." Then she rose and called out to the children: "Come, my children, you have gathered many chestnuts, and I am lazy, and have not one. *Allons!* We will return."

"Well," thought I, when alone once more, "there is a lover after all! But he does not care for her, or he would seek her through the world, as I would in his place. And she is young; she may forget, and I have heard somewhere that the man who loves a woman stands a better chance than the man she loves when the former has the advantage of propinquity. Who knows how this may end?"

It was an evening in December and intensely cold. I sat between a candle with a shade of ruby tissue paper and a blazing fire, with a tiger skin beneath my feet; madame dozed over her knitting in a corner! Bijou stretched himself before the fire, and mademoiselle, lovelier than I had ever seen her, in a gown of olive-green embroidered heavily with threads of burnished copper, held on her knee a box of sandalwood and fitted a key into the lock.

"These are the photographs that I promised to show you," said she, as the lid flew back.

The first was of a lady in the costume of the First Empire.

"You! mademoiselle!" I cried.

"Oh, no. It is my grandmother, taken and coloured from an old pastel. You see her hair is black and mine is blonde; her cheeks are red and mine are pale; otherwise we much resemble. This is my father in his uniform. Is he not a handsome man? This is myself as an infant. Don't laugh! I was of an age when one does not compel one's self to smile upon the camera. Ah! and this is *Naman* as a bride! The face is blurred; but observe the costume! Oh! she was a beauty in her youth, and very accomplished. She made the cushion upon which you rest your arm—the flowers, as you see, are fine, like a painting. But alas! since the last few years, her eyes have been impaired. Now she can only knit stockings!"

Suddenly Bijou raised himself and gave utterance to a series of staccato barks followed by a prolonged growl.

"*Tenez!*" cried mademoiselle. "What is that sound that I hear?"

"It is the wind," said I.

"It is the ghosts who howl and bite their thumbs at us," laughed mademoiselle. "And now, monsieur, *revenons à nos moutons!* This is the *salon* of our hotel in Paris. My father reads the *Figaro*. I rest my head against his arm, and *Maman*——"

In the hall beyond there was a sound as of stealthy steps on creaking timbers, then the door softly opened, and admitted three men in great coats.

Instantly mademoiselle was on her feet; her face was grey like ashes, her lips were blue, she shook in every limb, and yet her voice was calm and even cordial as she said:

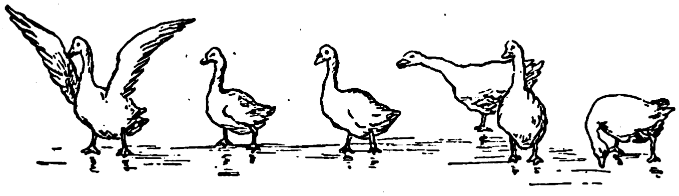
"Gentlemen, to what circumstance do we owe the honour of this visit?"

The spokesman, a powerful man, bowed low. "Madame la Comtesse de la Tour," said he. Then with the quickness of thought he crossed the room, and, with the grip of a vice, he brought down his hand on the shoulder of madame. "Comte Jean Phillipe de la Tour, I arrest you in the name of the Republic of France for the murder of Baron François de l'Hautemonde in Paris one year ago!"

* * * * *

For those who are interested in the story of the crime that shook all Paris to its centre, now about fifteen years ago, there are the papers of the time with harrowing particulars, published on the death of the Comte de la Tour in the Palace de la Revolution, and the suicide of the Comtesse, formerly the talented Mademoiselle Victorine, of the Théâtre Français. For me, the old love lives yet, and two new ghosts have come to burn their midnight lamps and show their haggard faces at the latticed windows of the haunted house across the way.

Mabel Miller.



THE SIMPLETON
LEO '95

THE Simpleton had made a break of fifty-two, and he turned round on his father with the do-that-every-time air of a man whose lush conceit takes the form of unctuous modesty.

"There is at least one thing you can do," said the old man, taking up his cue and chuckling a little to himself. "I am glad to have found it out."

"Any fool can play billiards," returned the Simpleton complacently—his father could not.

"It is a pity—a genuine pity, that you do not appreciate me more," he added, a little injured by the reflection on his intellectual faculties. "You miss the fundamental principle of my system."

"Your what?" queried the old man with something like concern.

"My system," repeated the Simpleton unabashed. "Go at everything backwards and you avoid any possible smacks in the eye—that's my theory," and he emphasised it by retreating a step on to the edge of the door as the footman entered with the coffee.

"Besides," he resumed, as soon as his voice could be heard above the clatter of breaking crockery, "to come down to first principles I am not self made. The law of heredity has been my curse. Whatever partial failure has attended my life is due to you. It is a severe handicap having a father and mother at all. The one thing which a man would thank his parents for they cannot transmit—experience."

The old man snorted.

"Were a child born with the accumulated experience of his ancestors," he observed, "that child would be insane before the end of its first year. Such an acquaintance with the world, the flesh, and the devil, would make his life sad, miserable, utterly joyless and desolate. The illusions of youth are life's ideal; disillusion makes no one happier or better. Indeed," added the old man, "contentment is a state of ignorance, not a state of knowledge."

"On second thoughts, I am inclined to agree with you," responded the Simpleton magnanimously. "All that old age and learning do for a man is to reveal the fact that he knows nothing. On second thoughts, too, there is something better even than experience that *may* be transmitted from father to son—money." The Simpleton was too polite to do more than emphasise the "may." But the expression was eloquent.

The scene was the billiard-room of Elthorne Manor. The old man was Sir Hamilton Aston-Superfield, and the Simpleton his son and heir.

Now Hamilton the second, known in familiar parlance as Tony, had not been, and was never likely to be, a success. His disgraceful career at school had culminated in expulsion, for having committed every crime in the calendar of youth. His first term at Oxford had added little to his own credit, and a good deal to that of the University tradesmen. It was this matter which now came up for discussion.

"I am very sorry," observed Sir Hamilton, "but these bills of yours are no affair of mine. You have seen fit to be extravagant, and now you must have lessons in economy. If there is one thing I can never forgive, one fault I can never overlook, it is running into debt."

The Simpleton looked unconcerned.

"It was you who drove me to it," he remarked, poising a liqueur-glass on his fingers. "If you send your son to the 'Varsity, you ought to see that his means are sufficient."

"Your allowance was extremely liberal," replied Sir Hamilton, "*extremely* liberal. When I was at Oxford, my father gave me a cheque for exactly half the amount you have found so insufficient, and I remember well how he told me he did not expect me to spend it all. But I somehow managed to keep out of debt. In fact, I made a point of paying for everything as I bought it, and consequently I never found myself in the humiliating embarrassment from which you now expect me to extricate you. Look at the tailor's bill—upon my soul it's musty with old age. And £80 for clothes in one term, too. Extravagance is a tendency which you will do very well to check, because there may come a time when we shall not be so well off as we are now."

"The end of the world has been prophesied," observed the Simpleton quite unperturbed. Then he extended his hand, and said very quietly: "May I look at that bill?"

"You may," said the old man.

The Simpleton examined it critically.

"I forgot to tell you about this," he observed. "Gilding thought you might settle it with the others. You notice it is drawn out to Hamilton Aston-Superfield, Esq., *but the date is* 1857; that, sir, I think is a little account of yours that still remains open on Gilding's books."

"You don't mean that," cried the old man. His face turned pink. He gasped a little, and, thinking of nothing more to say, took refuge in silence.

There was a look of triumph in the Simpleton's eyes.

"Taking them all round, I am not sure that our fathers were so much better than we are," he remarked, apparently addressing the billiard-table. "I am sure, my dear parent, in drawing a cheque for this little account, you will also settle mine." And before the old man could think of anything to say, the Simpleton had risen nonchalantly and gone off to bed.

* * * * *

It was the day before Tony returned to Oxford. Nothing more had been heard about the bills, but the question of his allowance naturally had to be broached.

"I am sorry," the old man said, "but the last year has been financially a bad one. I cannot afford you even the same allowance as you had last term. You must do as well as you can, and pray Heaven for better times."

The Simpleton sniggered. He looked at his father standing with his back to the fire, his coat-tails under his arms, and came to the conclusion that these bad times were a myth.

Owing to extreme youth, the Simpleton did not think himself half the fool that he was. Elated by the success of the little conspiracy which he and his tailor had concocted, he thought more of himself than ever.

"My worthy parent cannot deceive me like that," he confided to the ear of his confidential friend, as they sat together one evening in his rooms overlooking the "Broad." "The only question is, how am I to have my revenge? His niggardly spirit must be broken."

The confidential friend considered.

"Is your governor proud?" he queried.

"As proud as he is rich," replied the Simpleton. "What's your idea?"

"This," said his confidential friend. "Do as you have done before, only more so. Run up bills until they reach the length of a national petition to Parliament, or the manuscript of a country parson's sermon."

"What for?" said the Simpleton dully. "The old man would not pay them, and I should be ruined."

"He might *say* that he wouldn't," retorted the confidential friend, "but when it came to the point he would. A proud man will do anything to save his family name from disgrace. You know that yourself."

The Simpleton assented.

"I think," he observed, "that debts of honour would carry more weight than tradesmen's bills. But I like your idea, chummie."

And he set to work. Now, Oxford is not a difficult place in which to spend money—and there came a time when the Simpleton pulled up short, terrified by the extent of his liabilities.

"Double them," was the laconic advice of his confidential friend. "It is no good doing the thing at all unless you make a job of it. Besides, 'In for a penny, in for a pound,' you know. If there is going to be any hitch you may as well be a bankrupt for £2,000 as for £1,000."

"My dear fellow," said the Simpleton, in a sepulchral voice, "I owe nearly £5,000 already."

The confidential friend drew a long whistle of admiration.

"The dickins you do," he said. "Make it £10,000." One can afford to be reckless in advice.

The Simpleton began to regret that he had ever taken any from his friend. But it was too late to go back; too late for regret or remorse. After all, what was £10,000—or £20,000 for the matter of that—to his father. It was nonsense for him to talk about bad times. He was a mean miser, and this should be a lesson.

So the Simpleton argued. By the time that the end of the term approached, his indebtedness amounted exactly to £7,200.

"Capital," said his confidential friend.

The morning for going home arrived. The Simpleton felt exultant. It was certainly a triumph. He pictured his father's face of horror; and the more he thought of the *dénoûment*, the greater his exhilaration. There was a letter waiting for him on his breakfast-table. It was from the family solicitor, and ran thus:

Pump Handle Court.

Dear Sir,—It is our sad and painful duty to acquaint you of the fact that your respected father passed peacefully away yesterday at two o'clock. The doctors, we believe, attribute the cause of this sudden death to heart disease. We did not see that we should gain anything by wiring you. We trust you will allow us to express our sincerest sympathy in your bereavement. It is also our unfortunate duty to inform you that while Elthorne Manor is mortgaged up to £50,000, your beloved father's personality amounts to only £8,000. It will be necessary, therefore, that the house and estates are handed over to the mortgagees, which will leave you £8,000 in ready money. We happen to know of an admirable investment should you feel inclined to put this capital in some reliable business. You will have, of course, to pay your educational expenses at Oxford; and as we understand that you have overdrawn your allowance at the local bankers, it would be best, perhaps, if you would send them a cheque for the amount before we come to any decision about further investments.

We beg once more to express our sympathy with you, dear sir, and to remain, your humble servants, Jeremiah, Jones, and Jacob.

It was a very pale-faced, wreckish-looking individual who sat all that morning in the room overlooking the "Broad," with a pencil in his hand, and the table strewn with paper.

It came out in this manner, and the confidential friend himself said it was sad.

Legacy … … … …		£8,000
Amount due to University …	£200	
Overdrawn at the Bank … …	£500	
Thrown away … … …	£7,200	
		£7,900
Balance … …		£100

"It is not every man who has the pleasure of paying for his own education in classics and mathematics," the Simpleton observed, with something very much like a sob, "but when it comes to paying for his youthful indiscretions"——He broke off so overcome that he could not finish the sentence.

"I tell you what it is," he went on with melancholy philosophy, "the wisest men in the world are fools who do not think themselves smart."

"Or those who only give advice," said the confidential friend.

W. A. W.

Pink Blossoms.

War is always sacrifice—never mercy. War demands death and wounds and destruction. He who can kill and wound and destroy most is the greatest hero. War respects nothing, venerates nothing, blackens everything. It moves in trails across a country as a venomous serpent winds through the grass. You follow the trails, and look in vain for one single spot where mercy and pity stayed the hand of destruction. Blackness, desolation, death, and new-made graves are the milestones on the trails of war.

It was a May day, with the peach trees everywhere in blossom. Behind us were the smoke and flame of destruction; ahead the old farmhouses, which sheltered no one who could march in the ranks and fight against us. The fragrant blossoms, the green hills, the sunny skies—everything told of peace, and yet war was at hand as the flaxen-haired children came running to the doors.

Just below a farmhouse we halt to water our thirsty horses at a brook flowing lazily across the road. A few men ride on to the house. We can hear children crying in affright. We can hear the voice of a woman raised in tearful protestation. We can see an old grey-haired man with a child in his arms at the door, and though his voice is too weak to reach us, we can see by his gestures that he resents the lawless invasion of the premises.

Some of us ride to the right to reach the banks, where the waggons are already drawn up; some to the left, where the horses are at pasture; the remainder straight on up the road. Suddenly the bugles sound the alarm, and then warn us to rally on the centre. In one minute the scene is changed from dreamy peace to active war. A body of the enemy, having the same object in view as ourselves, has come up from the south and attacked us at sight. Many a saddle on our side is emptied before we check their fierce charge, and push them back till once more we have room to form.

Each side has a light battery. The guns get to work almost as soon as the carbine. The old farmhouse is the key of the battlefield.

An old man and a mother and four children are in there, but what of it? This is war. No one gives them a thought. Shot and shell plough through the ancient structure—bullets search out every nook and corner.

Now our right wing drives the enemy back with a cheer—now the enemy presses back our left and shouts in exultation. It is a hot fight for thirty minutes—time enough for the dead and wounded to number 150. The reverberation of the guns brings down a shower of blossoms at every discharge, and the black powder smoke floats up through the branches, and smirches and discolours and leaves its grime.

"Rally on the centre! Forward—trot—gallop—charge!"

We have broke the enemy and sent them flying. We follow them for a mile or more, shooting and hacking, and then the bugles blow the recall, and we cease the pursuit. There are dead men on the dusty highway, in the ditches, among the May weeds and the thistles, and dead horses almost block the way at certain points. Yes, a hot little fight, and we are proud of our victory as we return to the old farmhouse.

We have our dead to bury, and our wounded to look after, and it is only when an officer starts to enter the house to say that it must be turned into a shambles that the inmates are remembered. The officer cries out and starts back in horror. Under the peach tree growing close to the back door lies the body of the grey-haired man—father and grandfather to the woman and children respectively.

He must have been in flight when struck by a solid shot, which cut him almost in two at the hips. He was carrying a child not more than two years old hugged to his breast. Her little arms were round his neck, and her face was hidden in his bosom. We unclasped the old man's arms and took her up. She was dead—dead without a wound. She had died of terror as he sank down with her, perhaps kissing her in his last breath.

As we stood with uncovered heads the woman came out. Great Heavens! but how white her face—how ghastly the colour of her lips—how red the blood which dripped from her wounded shoulder on the pink blossoms at her feet! She looked at her father and gasped for breath. She looked at her youngest born, and her throat swelled up, and her eyes dilated until her look frightened me.

"Dead, both dead?" she asked in a whisper.

"Poor woman!" replied the officer as we turned our heads away.

"Go in," she hissed, pointing to the door; "go in and gaze upon the rest of your work."

There they lay—the other three children—all killed and mangled by the same shell as it exploded in the kitchen. Flaxen hair and chubby hands and little blue sun-bonnets contrast strangely with the red blood of war. We tiptoed out, and stood beside the mother, who had prostrated herself on the bodies of those so dear to her. She could not weep and wail. She could only moan and croon to them in the agony of her breaking heart.

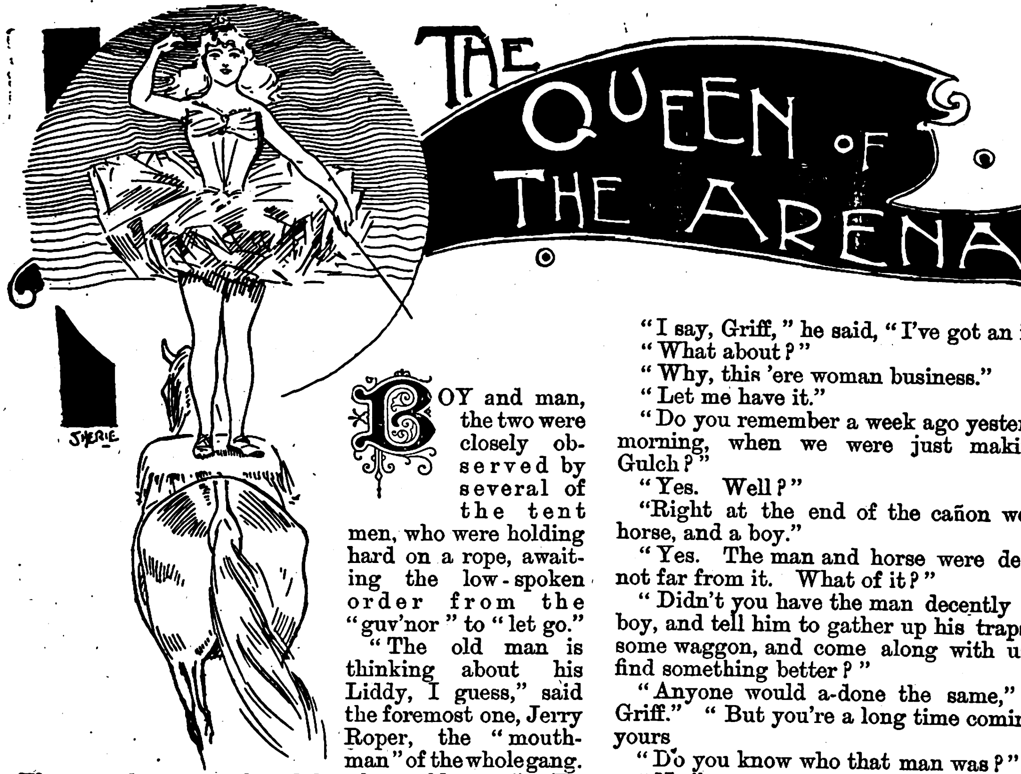
"Poor woman, poor woman!" sighed one.

She rose up slowly, looked from face to face as if to picture it on her memory, and said:

"Leave me! May the God of Heaven take vengeance upon you to the uttermost!"

And we called it a hot little fight, and we felt proud of a victory won over a superior force, and we—well, each and every trooper prayed Heaven to be merciful and pitiful to that poor woman, and over the graves of her dear ones a hundred rough and blood-stained hands scattered peach-tree blossoms in atonement. We could do no more. War was impatient and angered even as we did that.

N. N.



THE QUEEN OF THE ARENA

BOY and man, the two were closely observed by several of the tent men, who were holding hard on a rope, awaiting the low-spoken order from the "guv'nor" to "let go."

"The old man is thinking about his Liddy, I guess," said the foremost one, Jerry Roper, the "mouth-man" of the whole gang.

The remark was overheard by the "old man." He unfolded his arms, lifted the brim of his hat so that the nearest torch shot its sallow yellow light into his eyes, brightening up a worried, unpleasant countenance.

"And sorry was the day for all of us," he said, "when my lady, the Queen of the Arena, left us for good and all."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Jerry. "A man's wife is the best friend he can have in the world, and when she's gone, good-bye to all that is worth living for."

The "old man" sighed and shook his head in sympathy with the remark.

He was an "old man" and "old Griff" thus interchangeably called by his men—only in a figurative sense, for his age was but little past thirty. A man ages fast in experience, conducting such a show as his, and travelling as it was through the rough mining districts of California. On heavily displayed bills that were posted on the sides of tents and shanties, and on some of the larger trees, he was, besides, "the most renowned bareback rider that the world has ever seen."

Presently he said:

"Somethin's got to be done—somethin's got to be done right off. I'd like to know what kind of a show that is in these days that has no woman in it. We hain't made money enough in the past week," he growled in conclusion, "to buy horsefeed, let alone settling up the salary list."

This was something of an exaggeration, but fitted in well with "old Griff's" moody condition, and he again pulled his hat over his eyes, shrugging his shoulders as he did so.

Jerry Roper had had something of an idea, too; and he lounged with it towards the centre pole.

"I say, Griff," he said, "I've got an idea."

"What about?"

"Why, this 'ere woman business."

"Let me have it."

"Do you remember a week ago yesterday, early in the morning, when we were just making Lazy Man's Gulch?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Right at the end of the cañon we saw a man, a horse, and a boy."

"Yes. The man and horse were dead, and the boy not far from it. What of it?"

"Didn't you have the man decently buried, feed the boy, and tell him to gather up his traps, stow them in some waggon, and come along with us until he could find something better?"

"Anyone would a-done the same," grumbled "old Griff." "But you're a long time coming to that idea of yours

"Do you know who that man was?"

"No."

"Well, I've talked with the boy. He's took quite a fancy to me, and he says as how his father was a sort of a showman in the juggling way. He was pretty old, and badly down at the heel. So when his old horse gave out he gave out too, and they laid down there and died together."

"Old Griff" stopped Jerry abruptly, by touching him gently on the breast with his forefinger, and said solemnly: "That's just what I was thinking about myself." And Jerry added, as though there had not been the least break in his remarks: "The boy is supple and graceful, learns easily, and in a week has picked up a good many tricks of the ring."

All this time Griff had never once taken his eyes off the slender lad who was still seated beside him. Griff walked over towards him.

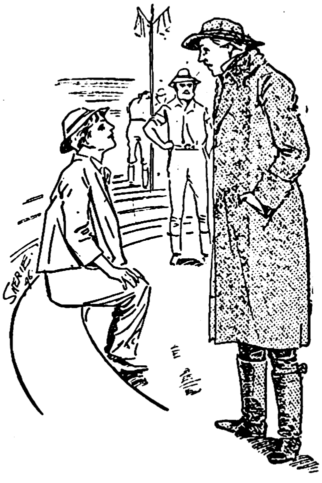
"How old are you?" he asked.

"Don't know," replied the lad. "About sixteen or seventeen, I should think."

"Did you ever ride a horse?" pursued Griff.

The boy's bright face lighted up, and he repeated, slowly:

"Did—I—ever—ride



"Did you ever ride a horse?" pursued Griff.

—a—horse?" He smiled serenely. "I—should—just—think—so."

"Do you like horses?"

The lad's only reply was a partial whistle.

"As soon as the tent is up to-morrow morning," said Griff, "you come to me wherever you can find me." Then he walked away again, repeating his words: "Somethin's got to be done, and done at once, and I'd like to know why not."

Thirty miles away from there, by nine o'clock next morning the tent was up, with all its flags flying, and the busy side-show people screaming their attractions to the early comers. Griff was in the ring, and the boy was with him. By the light of day the lad was seen to be a slender youth, straight-limbed and erect, head nicely poised on his shoulders; a fair, fresh complexion, and light hair, but with eyes so dark a brown that they seemed, in contrast with the flesh, to be dead black. Over a flannel shirt he wore an old blue blouse, fitting his form loosely, and brown trousers that must have been made originally for his father; and blouse, trousers, patched low shoes, and ragged slouch hat, were all of ancient pedigree.

Griff looked the boy all over, and his eyes and face showed that his scrutiny had satisfied him. He had given some previous directions, for as they stood there, one of the attendants led into the ring a horse having on his back a well-worn "pad."

"There she is," the attendant said.

The lad looked up at him quickly.

"Do you think you could stand on that pad while the horse walked round the ring?" Griff asked.

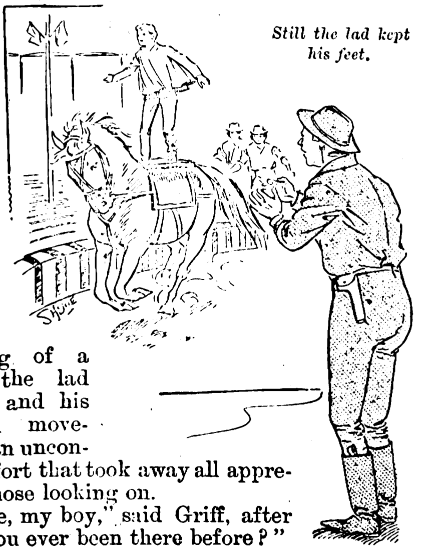
"Try me and see," was the reply.

"Well—get on."

The lad sat down in the ring and pulled off his shoes, leaving his feet bare. Then he tossed his ragged cap towards the centre pole, and with a short run and spring he was astride the horse.

"Lead him slowly round," said Griff to the attendant, and then as his order was obeyed, he added: "Let's see what you can do." This latter to the lad.

He was on his feet instantly, and his various movements were as free and unconstrained as though he had been on a level floor.



Still the lad kept his feet.

"Let him go faster," he said to the attendant, and Griff nodded.

The horse, an old and safe hand at the business, with a touch sprang into one of those long, slow, regular strides, whose rise and fall can be timed by the ticking of a clock. Still the lad kept his feet, and his lithe, graceful movements showed an unconsciousness of effort that took away all apprehension from those looking on.

"Look a-here, my boy," said Griff, after a time, "have you ever been there before?"

"Never," replied the lad.

"Well, that settles it, then," said Griff.

The boy looked at him curiously, but nothing more was said.

Simms, advance agent of the show, was recalled. He and Griff had a long conference one morning, and off he went again. For two weeks every morning for an hour, and every afternoon for two hours, the boy was in the ring, with Griff looking on. No one knew exactly what it meant, and no one suspected, excepting Jerry Roper.

One morning Griff called the lad into the dressing-tent, and they went to a great chest in the corner. Griff knelt down and unlocked it. Lifting the cover, he displayed a quantity of dresses, brilliant-coloured ribbons, gilt and spangles. The lad standing by thought he saw tears in his eyes, and felt certain that he sighed.

"This hasn't been opened for more'n six months since she died," said Griff, half soliloquising, as he touched very gently the soft fabrics that were exposed to view. "But somethin's got to be done," he added, as though bracing himself with the thought—"somethin's got to be done at once. Why not?"

The lad looked at him with curiosity.

Griff raised his head.

"Look here," he said. "You see our show. It's a good one as far as it goes, but it don't go far enough. It used to be perfect when she was with us. She could draw. She was as pretty and sweet as a rose, and she'd fill our tent three times a day. Our business has dropped off to almost nothin'—that is, nothin' beyond expenses—and somethin's got to be done. I wouldn't let no other woman wear her clothes, but I'd let you, for I think you'll be a credit to 'em. We can fix you up so's no one could tell that you wasn't as pretty a girl as ever danced a sailor's hornpipe. Some red on your cheeks and lips, a little black on your eyebrows and eyelashes, and a nice blonde wig, and there you are. You can help us out, and make a nice pile for yourself too."

The boy stood still with his eyes cast rather disdainfully upon the finery on the ground. His attitude, with his hands crossed in front of him, was that of decided unwillingness.

"Come now," continued Griff, "where would you a' been except for me? I don't want to preach up my own deeds, but I helped you out of a pinch. Turn about, my boy, and help me out of a pinch."

The boy was evidently touched by this appeal, and by Griff's serious manner.

"If I do, I'll have to wear these things all of the time," objected the boy, touching the skirts disdainfully. "Then it's cheating, and if they ever find out—phew!"—ending with a low-drawn whistle.

"They? Who?" asked Griff.

"Why, these wild men of the mines. They'd tear your tent all to pieces to find themselves sold."

"Never you mind about that," said Griff. "I'll take care of them, and you would not have to wear a dress exceptin' durin' your acts."

"Well, give me the things, and I'll see how they look," said the boy rather petulantly. He grasped a quantity in his hands, and moved towards an inner dressing-room.

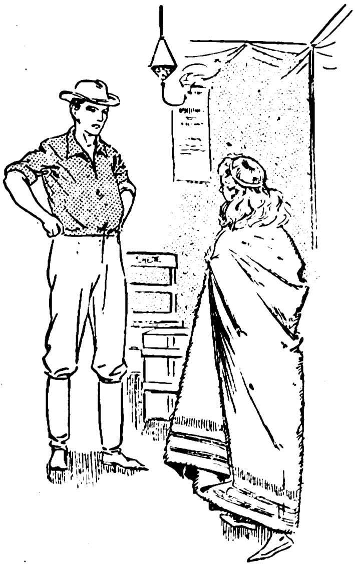
A week after that, as in the early morning the great "London Sensation," under Alonzo Griffin, drove into the neighbourhood of a great mining camp, there were some new and very red and blue bills to be seen, announcing the first appearance in this country, and secured at an enormous outlay, of Annetta Belora, the

Bavarian Equestrienne. All down the bills were frequent reference to her, sometimes with great alliterative attractiveness as the "Bavarian Beauty" or the "Beautiful Bavarian," or, again, as being as sparkling and lively and bewitching as the beer of her native country.

As Jerry Roper said that evening:

"He took those fellows clean off their feet, and it's business again. I never saw this tent packed as it was this afternoon and evening, and Griff says he's already received seven offers of marriage and five chances at a share in a successful silver mine." Then Jerry very quietly chuckled as he thought of the solid basis on which the salary list was suddenly placed.

Whether or not it was true that the lad had taken all the men of that comparatively womanless town off their feet, he had at least had a powerful effect on one young fellow. This one had drifted in with the throng in the afternoon, and had been a rather listless spectator until the appearance of the "Bavarian." He was attracted at first, and then completely captivated. He returned in the evening, and in lieu of the bouquets and other flowers that are showered on favourites in the East, he flung at the lad, as he passed from the ring to the dressing-tent, a small bag of gold dust. "Annetta" picked it up, and gave a grateful glance at the donor that put the finishing touch upon his infatuation.



"I say. I want to speak to you."

The young fellow, as powerful as Hercules, crushed his way through the throng at the conclusion of the entertainment and ran round to the dressing-tent. He pushed his way past the helpers and horses until he approached the corner where the lad stood, wrapped in so large a blanket that he was entirely hidden except his face and curly blonde wig. The stranger brusquely cried out:

"I say. I want to speak to you."

"Out with it," replied the lad.

"I had a little sister once, who, if she had grown up to be a girl, would have looked, I think, just as you look. What's your name?"

Old Griff came up at this.

"The sister dodge is played out here," he said.

Annetta laugh a chirrupy laugh, and disappeared as directed.

Griff gave a little whistle, and wherever he came from, there suddenly appeared between the young stranger and the curtained corner an immense man with a particularly brutal countenance, and muscles so big you could almost see them working beneath his garments as he moved. He was one of the canvas men, and rejoiced in the name of "Rocky the Rough."

"Better go back, young fellow," said Rocky. "You ain't wanted here."

"I believe you've stolen my sister," said the young man. "I'm going to see her, and get from her own mouth something about herself."

"Oh are yer?" said Rocky.

"Get out of the way," cried the stranger, and he made a move to push past his opponent; but it was only a move, for he felt himself, in spite of his own strength, which was by no means small, lifted from the ground, and carried outside the tent.

"Stay outside," said Rocky, as he placed the young stranger firmly on his feet. "I don't think it will be healthy for you to try to come inside again. Your sister? Ho, ho!" Then he disappeared inside.

The young man was greatly put out in more senses than one, and stood just a minute thinking what he should do next. No one could have entertained for a moment any doubt of his honesty of purpose and earnestness if he could have seen the expression of his face.

He felt a slight touch on his elbow, and, turning by the dim light of the stars, saw a lad standing close beside him.

"I say," said the boy, looking up with an eager expression in his eyes, "what is the sister racket that you have been a-givin' of us?"

The young man looked curiously down at the slender figure at his side, whose words were so unlike the tone used or the earnestness of the attitude unconsciously chosen.

"If you'd tell me," continued the boy, "perhaps I might help you. I know 'em all well in there. And if I couldn't, perhaps I could tell you somethin' that'd make you holler."

There was a sober earnestness about the boy that attracted the young man to him strangely.

"Well, there ain't any but little, anyhow," he said, "and it won't take long; but if you don't do as you say you will, I'll break every bone in your body. D'ye hear?"

"Yes; gallop along; my bones are all safe enough."

"My mother," began the young man, "was one of the best ring performers in the whole profession. She was the first woman in the world that ever did a bareback act, and my father was one of those old-fashioned clowns, who told stories in the ring and flung stale jokes at the audience when nothing else was going on. When I was about twelve years old my mother was kicked by a vicious horse, and so badly hurt that after lingering a few weeks in great agony, she died. We were three left—father, myself, and a little sister only about four years of age at that time. Misfortunes heaped upon us then. Father lost his voice, became rheumatic, and wasn't fit for the ring or any show. I was a stout lad of fourteen or fifteen, and put out into the world for myself. I travelled three or four seasons with a show, but I didn't like it, and it didn't like me. So I came out here, and here I've been, sometimes in luck, sometimes dead down on it, ever since, with the exception of one winter, when I thought it was about time for me to hunt up my relations and went east to do it. None of us were much in the letter way, and we hadn't heard of each other during the twelve or fourteen years of our separation but once or twice. I might as well have stayed here, for I didn't find hind or hair of them. Even their names were forgotten, except by some of the 'old timers' who recalled the daring horsemanship of my mother. That's all, my boy," concluded the young man. "Now bring me to Annetta."

"What has Annetta got to do with it all?"

"Do?" said the young man eagerly. "Everything. She was the image of my mother as she rode to-day. It was for all the world to me as though I was a little boy again, and sat looking with a child's delight at the picture she made in her ribbons, laces, and spangles, flying round the ring."

"What's your name?" asked the lad.

"What's that got to do with it?" angrily replied the young man, clutching his arm. "Bring me to the girl, as you said you would, or I'll crush you into a thousand pieces!"

The boy uttered a cry of pain, and followed it up with the exclamation:

"Don't! don't! I'm Annetta myself."

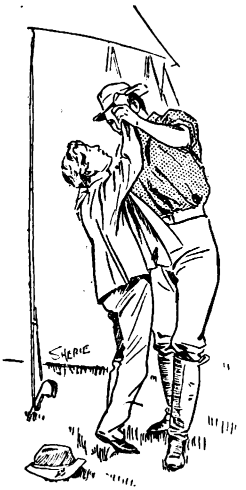
"You!" The young man looked at him in the shadow with a fierce scowl. "Why, you little liar!" he continued. "I ought to have known that you were putting up some showman's job on me. If you were bigger I'd pummel you into a jelly!" and he flung him to one side.

Luckily the place where the boy struck was on the canvas, and between two of the tent poles, or he might have been seriously injured by the shock.

"I'm not a liar," he said. "Look here!" and he took from his pocket the bag of gold dust that the young man had flung at him after his act. The young man seized him again and dragged him towards the light that glimmered through a chink in the dressing-tent. He took his head roughly in both hands, holding the face so that the light fell full upon it.

An eager and intent expression came into the young man's eyes as he looked, and the lad trembled in the rough grasp. The paint was not entirely washed from the face and eyes, and there was enough there to show that the lad had told the truth. The scrutiny was kept up until the boy fairly writhed in the grasp with which he was held, and then the young man, loosening his hold and exclaiming: "Well, I'm blessed!" went wrathfully away, disappearing in the darkness.

The lad had dropped upon the ground, and alternately rubbing his arm and his head, was crying bitterly.



"Don't! don't! I'm Annetta myself."

"Why didn't he tell me his real name," he muttered to himself. "He ain't got no sister—leastways he don't deserve to have none, to treat a poor little fellow like me so. He'll be sorry for it some day."

The tent was suffocatingly full at each of the three performances on the next day. Old Griff was very happy, and Jerry Roper made frequent allusions to the salary list. At night it seemed as though the throng was so large that it made the canvas bulge out all round, and if any more had made an effort to come in it would have split the tent from centre pole to entrance-door. The crowd was not an orderly one. It was boisterous and unruly, and had duly provided itself with deep potations to keep its feelings up to the proper height.

Few women were present, and most of the men were without coats, some without hats, and many with their brawny chests bare. It was the last night of the show at that camp, and there seemed to be a determination, perhaps a predetermination from the first, to make trouble and guy the whole performance.

Old Griff thought the final act in the ring, when the lad made his appearance, would settle the whole difficulty, and hurried along the several numbers on his programme in order to reach it.

The increasing clamour and tumult should have shown him how mistaken he was. It seemed as though the crowd was working itself up to a climax, and reached it when the master in the ring announced the coming of the "most wonderful, and at the same time the most beautiful lady equestrian in the world."

The lad appeared from the dressing-tent, looking, indeed, in his make-up, and by the glare of the central ring of blazing lights, very pretty. He was greeted with a shout whose character, whether of derision or delight, it would have been difficult to tell, it was so tumultuous. He tripped lightly over the sawdust, and sprang easily upon the spirited horse.

They went twice round the ring amid comparative quiet; but it was only as though the crowd had stopped for a moment to take breath, or like a wild animal hesitating just before it springs upon its expected victim.

In the midst of this quiet a rough voice cried out from the throng:

"That's him! We're fooled! It's only a boy dressed up as a girl!" Then came shouts from all directions: "Out with him! Down with the tent! Away with the fraud!"

For an instant old Griff was dismayed at the situation of affairs, coming in such an unexpected way to him. He was never before placed in quite such a close corner. Thoughts flew through his head like lightning, suggesting ways out of the difficulty that surrounded him. The very thing that he thought would restore quiet, order, and good feeling, was the very thing towards which the tumult had been making up its way.

The frightened horse on which the equally alarmed lad rode did not get three times round the ring. A tall man, lying flat on his face on the ground, not twenty feet away from him, laid the long muzzle of a pistol on the top of the earthen ring. There was a report, a wreath of smoke, and the handsomest and most valuable horse in old Griff's whole stud, with a bullet that entered his body just behind the near foreleg, fell dead.

The lad luckily sprang nimbly to his feet and looked round for some way out of the ring. The shot stirred up the final drop in the animosity and venom of the drunken mob. The boy saw, in the instant that he looked, surrounding him an angry circle, glance whichever way he would, of fierce ugly-faced wild men, bent on mischief. He shrank away towards the centre pole in an agony of fear, covered his face with his hands, sank upon the ground and burst into tears.

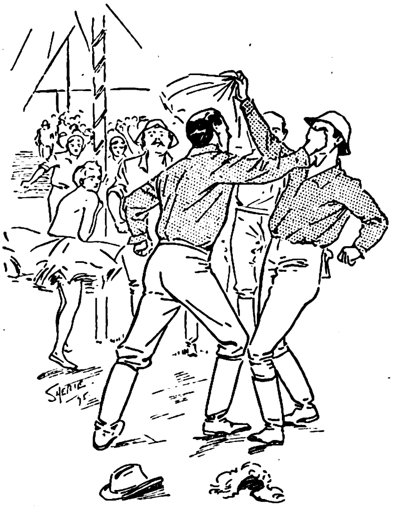
He was not alone, however. Old Griff called to "Rocky the Rough" and his three or four other helpers, and the half dozen or so men were able to spring into the ring and gather about the centre pole before the throng could stumble over the low embankment and have it all to themselves.

"Look out for the boy!" old Griff shouted to his men.

The screaming, frenzied mob surged in upon the half dozen men within the ring. The contest was too close for the use of the ever-present and ever-ready pistol, and it was at first a question of muscle and strength. "Rocky the Rough" swung his huge form, arms, and fists in every direction, and where the latter stopped a man was sure to drop. Three or four pistol shots were heard outside, and then someone called out: "They've cut the stay ropes of the centre pole."

That this was true, the tall spar itself instantly began to show. It swayed this way and that. but was held for a time by the canvas and the ropes of the side walls.

Old Griff stood just in front of the lad, and there the pushing, struggling and fighting seemed to be the fiercest, as though the crowd was most eager to wreak its vengeance on him who had himself acted the deception. With a surge and a swing from the rear that could not be resisted, old Griff was thrown on one side, and the foremost in the throng had his hand on the boy. He tore the curly blonde wig from his head and, holding it in the air, called the attention of the mob to it, who replied with yells of satisfaction.



Then he was struck squarely between the eyes.

He tossed it among them, and it was torn to pieces. Then he forced the shrinking boy upon his feet. He, with clasped hands, begged for mercy, where there was none. Griff tore the thin gauze skirts from the trembling form, and tossed them piecemeal over at the crowd. These, too, were torn in shreds by eager hands. He seized the lace, ribbons, and spangles at the neck, and, with one wrench, tore them away down to the waist.

There was a sudden hush in the tumult.

He who still held the torn pieces of gauze in his hands stood a moment as if petrified, then he was struck squarely between the eyes, and dropped like a piece of lead to the ground. The young stranger who had sought to see Annetta the evening before had delivered the blow, and seized the lad in his arms.

There was a single unanimity of expression amongst those standing the nearest as they looked. Old Griff started it.

"Good gracious! Can it be?" he cried.

"Rocky the Rough," looking round, echoed the cry. A third took it up, and, finding it too deep for any other word, could only add:

"Well—well—well—well!"

Then Jerry Roper came in with a good fourth, adding to make sure his position——

"He's a woman after all!"

The young stranger holding the trembling form close to his own, and looking down into the painted, but so much the more haggard face, asked:

"Then you *are* Frank Crohger?"

"And—you—Robert?"

He nodded, but she could not see him, for she had fainted.

With the wayward and quick changing moods of a mob, the fact that they had been warring upon a woman, and that the mistake was all their own, almost instantly becoming known to them, their animosity changed to a friendliness that was almost as rough as had been their anger in its manifestations. They hunted up the man who had shot the horse, and forced him to "settle" to an amount three or four times the value of the animal. They decided, late as it was, that the performance must all be gone through with again; that the tent must be cleared, and everybody must pay for admission. Woe be to that person, too, who showed the least inclination to criticise or to object to anything. He should die. And they meant it.

The tent was cleared, and the ring again prepared for work. The ticket seller took his place in the waggon, and his only difficulty was in handing out the bits of pasteboard fast enough. No one stopped for any change or asked for it, and old Griff said, when he came to settle up next morning, that one more such benefit would have made him the richest man in the profession anywhere.

Playing to such an audience, the whole company fairly outdid themselves, and for the "Beautiful Bavarian" there was a tremendous ovation. When she did finally retire, threatened with a returning unconsciousness, from which she had not fairly recovered when she made her appearance, she could call herself a very well-to-do girl from the favours cast upon her by the generous crowd.

"Why didn't you tell me who you were last night?" asked her brother after the performance was over.

"I would have done so if you had let me," was the reply; "but you were so awfully rough and hasty with me. Besides, I remembered the last words father ever spoke to me. 'Be a boy, Frank,' he said, 'as long as you can. Boys get along better'n girls. You have been such to me for more'n fifteen years now. And don't give yourself away to anybody—anybody, d'ye hear?—unless you're cock sure you've got 'em dead to rights.'"

"She played it pretty fine on all of us, didn't she?" struck in Jerry Roper, "but I suspected her, after all!"

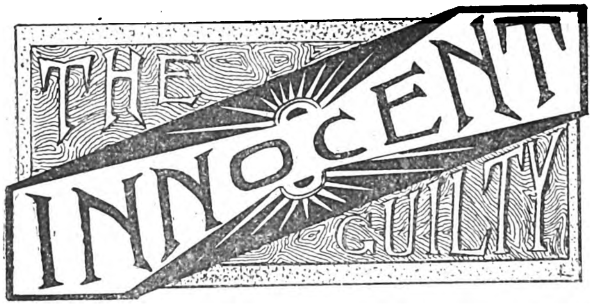
Robert tried to persuade his sister to remain with him, but old Griff seemed to have obtained a stronger influence over her than he could exert, and the next day she travelled on with the show, her and its reputation made by an incident that was made the most of.

During the year Robert had intimations now and then from her how it would all end, and the next season, when the show made its annual visit to the camp, she was, as Jerry Roper explained it: "No longer Frank Crohger, nor even Annetta Belora, except on the bills, but Mrs. Alonzo Griffin, as sprightly as a new india-rubber ball, as pretty as her mother, as prosperous and fortunate as a diamond king, and as happy as a good husband, plenty of money, and immense popularity with the public could make her."

J. P. L.

Next Week

"The Queen of Night," a thrilling story by Headon Hill, author of "Guilty Gold," etc., etc., will commence in *Short Stories*, illustrated profusely each week by Raymond Potter.



THE INNOCENT GUILTY

"WE find him guilty," announced the jury, and he accepted the verdict with the air of a man in a dream—and a very unpleasant one at that.

"'Tis very queer," exclaimed all his friends, with more or less sympathy, according to their capacity. "Who would have thought him such a brute?"

"He is innocent," cried those who loved him, and so he was. But he is still in prison. Never mind what his name is. We will call him the Innocent Guilty.

When he was innocent only, and some year and a half before he was guilty, he made the mistake of loving the Wrong Girl. This he promptly followed up by another—that of tiring of her. She was the Wrong Girl for him to tire of, also, and I have often thought how much better it would have been for him to have stuck to his first mistake. But he thought he could not.

A woman would have pretended to do so, but being a man he was more honest in his badness. And he thought it was a fine, bold, manly thing to explain to the Wrong Girl just how he felt about it. He told her that he had made a mistake, and that it would be a terrible thing, not to say a wicked thing, for a man to marry a woman he no longer loved.

It almost seemed as if she agreed with him, she was so still. They had just returned from the theatre, and she said nothing until she had carefully removed the hat-pins from her little round toque. She looked in the glass as she did so, and her face grew very grey. He could see her reflection from where he stood, and it seemed almost as if the words came from that grey face in the glass when she finally muttered:

"You shall never marry *her!*"

This startled him extremely, as he found it hard to imagine where she had heard of the Right Girl. For there was a Right Girl, or one whom he now considered to be right. But the Wrong Girl had never heard of the Right Girl, and it was merely a guess—a very natural one. But the poor Innocent Guilty stood first on one foot and then on the other, and felt very sad, and very sorry for her, especially so as he congratulated himself that she was taking it so quietly.

This was where he made his third mistake. If he had looked less at the childish, wide open eyes, and more at the close shut lips and strongly curved chin, he might still have been disporting himself in this very pleasant outer world.

"I—I—thought I loved you," said the Innocent Guilty; "but—it—was all a mistake—and—it is over now."

In this the Innocent Guilty was again mistaken.

But the Wrong Girl only stared thoughtfully at the pretty red flowers in the shabby carpet of the little room.

"And so—this is the end?" she asked finally, after carefully wetting her dainty lips with her kitten-like tongue.

"It is better so," he answered softly and quite tenderly. She seemed so young and so helpless in her sorrow. But what could he do? You cannot force love to stay at the first hotel he comes to. So they both stood there looking at each other in an odd, still way.

"Kiss me, then," said she, and almost smiled. He was much relieved. What he had dreaded was over. But it occurred to him that it would be well to wait until out of doors before allowing his set face to relax. He turned to leave the room.

Her lips had not trembled when he kissed her, and her hand was just as steady. Suddenly there was a sharp, stinging report, and the cheap paper of the walls flashed under a pale blue glare. At first the Innocent Guilty feared he was shot. Since then he has wished that he had been.

Then he turned, and there in a little soft huddled heap lay the Wrong Girl on the floor, close beside a small toilet-table draped with faded chintz. Its upper drawer was open, and at her side in one clenched hand was a pistol—a toy affair—one of his own.

Here he made another mistake. He stood above her where she lay like a wounded bird, with her bright, dilated eyes fixed on him, and closed the drawer; then he put himself still more on record as a fool by gently unclasping her small fingers and taking from them the pistol, wondering dully as he did so why her blood was not as red as the flowers in the carpet; and like a taunt came the words:

"You shall never marry *her!*"

And as he gazed, as if fascinated by the round, wide-open eyes of the Wrong Girl, the door burst open, and framed another ghastly face within its square. It was that of the landlady, who apparently disapproved of the whole affair. And he immediately told her he was sorry the thing had happened, and that he feared it might injure the letting of her rooms. She was afterwards, it is unnecessary to state, the principal witness for the prosecution.

And the Wrong Girl turned her eyes from one to the other with a queer look of appreciation.

She hung closely to life for about forty-eight very unpleasant hours, and then let go serenely enough, as a tired child turns to sleep in its nursery bed.

And all through those hours he—the Innocent Guilty—begged her in an agony which was naturally very genuine, to make a statement which would clear him.

But she would only look at him with that first queer gaze, and then whimpering softly, clasp his neck with her languid arms, while she repeated again and again that she had loved him always. And his questions and her answers sounded very badly when they were repeated at the trial. They proved his guilt very conclusively.

And as gradually breath became a rare thing greatly to be desired, and her eyes grew dull and bead-like, she would only moan plaintively and say nothing.

And when she at last died, and her baby face regained its roundness and soft smiling lips which had caused him to make his first mistake, he showed how depraved he really was for the first time, as he ejaculated in what seemed the helplessness of despairing rage:

"I hate you!"

Which unguarded expression told against him particularly heavily at the trial.

He had been in prison quite a year, however, before he received a letter from the Right Girl, in which she strongly advised him to so occupy the superfluous time which was now his, that when they should all meet once more in another world they should be happy together again, and adding that, in the meantime, she had married his Best Friend.

E. C. WAGGENER.

A Romance of the Stage.

Mr. and Mrs. Clifford were on their honeymoon; it was not difficult for anyone to see that; but in the quiet little seaside village of Lytham, few, if any, probably, of the visitors recognised in Mr. Clifford the popular tenor of a certain well-known London theatre; a man whose magnificent voice night after night caused the theatre he was performing in to be crowded to suffocation.

As he lounged lazily on the beach, with his clean-shaven face turned towards his companion, he was not an exceptionally handsome-looking man, although his features were clearly defined and well cut, and his eyes, dark brown, had an irresistible look about them. At east, so thought his newly-made bride, who, oddly enough, had never as yet seen him on the stage. Had she done so with all the adventitious aid of the dresser's art, she would have been fain to confess that he was indeed a handsome man.

However, she was quite content with him as he was, and she might not have been surprised to hear that half the women in fashionable London had at one time or other fancied themselves in love with him.

Not that she would have cared for that, for had he not chosen her in preference to all others? and was he not her very own hubby, and the best hubby in the world? The sweets of honeymooning had not as yet begun to pall upon her. It was, in fact, less than a week since they had been married, and this had been their first real stopping place, the intervening period having been spent in moving about from one place to another.

Theirs had been purely a love match. Thrown together at a large country house in August, when the fashionable tenor, in consequence of the theatre being closed, had been able to snatch a few weeks' holiday—"resting," he had called it—he had been attracted by her sweet, girlish ways, so different to what he had been used to, and she, on her part, had in maidenly fashion reciprocated his attentions.

Shyly at first, being impressed with the importance attached to such a universal favourite of the London public as he was; then by degrees her dread of him vanishing. Before the time came for the party to break up, Mr. Clifford, as he was known off the stage, had proposed and been accepted.

At first her people, who occupied a good position in the county, had objected, but seeing that remonstrance would be worse than useless, had finally consented, with one stipulation, that the marriage should not take place for a year from the date of the engagement, during which time there was to be no seeing each other. They argued to themselves, probably, that long before the stated period had elapsed in the rush and excitement consequent upon the position of a popular tenor in a fashionable London theatre, who had the *entrée* to some of the best society in town, Clifford's infatuation for their little country Dorothy would have become effectually dispelled. But in this they reckoned without their man. He had kept his word, and had not attempted to see his lady love. Nothing, however, had been said as to their not writing to each other, an omission of which they took full advantage.

And now, exactly at the stipulated time, London having emptied itself of its fashionable votaries, including the majority of people who occupy the best boxes and orchestra stalls, the theatres in the West-End were for the most part closed, the one at which Mr. Clifford proved such an attraction amongst the rest, and he was free until the autumn to go where he would.

Having honestly kept his word, Dorothy's parents felt that they could no longer raise any reasonable objection, and one bright August day she and Mr. Clifford were married, very quietly, in the little church at Westerhay. So quietly, in fact, that the event was not even chronicled, as it most assuredly would have been had it been known generally, in the London papers. The orthodox announcement in the *Times* had not revealed the secret to the world at large, Mr. Clifford and Mr. Arthur Montgomery not being associated as one and the same, except in the case of his intimate friends.

"And so you want to hear me sing in public, do you, little woman? I am afraid you will hardly know me in my stage attire."

"Oh, George, as if I shouldn't know you anywhere."

"Oh, but I am quite a different personage on and off the stage, I assure you. When I am made up as a gay Lothario, for instance."

"George, dear."

"Yes, little woman?"

"Do you—do you have to make love much in your part?"

"What! Jealous, little woman?"

"No; but I shouldn't like to see you ki—kiss another woman, somehow."

"My dear child, the leading lady that I have to do my billing and cooing with is old enough to be your mother. You will see her, of course, when we get back, and are settled down."

"Oh, but aren't there any young ladies in the piece?"

"Lots of 'em, my dear."

"And do you ever——"

"Oh, yes—chuck 'em under the chin, put my arm round their waists, and all that, you know—all in the way of business, of course—one has to; but what a silly little goose it is." And here followed—— Fortunately it was a very secluded part of the beach:

"Oh, don't, George. Somebody may see us," jumping up. "And now, you lazy boy, are you going to get your letters?"

"I left word, little woman, that that small boy at our lodgings was to bring them to me here; I told him where we should be, and here he is," as a bright-faced, tanned complexioned youngster came round the corner of the cliff.

"Thanks, my little man. Here's something for you," handing him a sixpence.

"Here you are, Dolly, one, two, three, for you; and, let me see, a baker's dozen for me."

Both were soon speedily engaged in reading their correspondence. Mr. Clifford's was not of a very interesting nature apparently, as, after glancing at one letter after another casually, he threw them down by his side.

Mrs. Clifford evidently found more enjoyment in hers, as she read them through with a look of pleasurable interest, and having done so, placed them in her pocket, leaving the envelopes on the sand at her feet.

"What are yours all about, George? I had such a nice one from mamma, another from Dick (her brother), and one from a girl-friend in Town."

"Mine; oh, most of 'em business," tearing another open as he spoke. This he glanced at casually; a cynical smile came over his face, and he quietly put it in his pocket.

"Ah, this is better," he said, the next moment, as he opened the last of the batch; "this is something like, now." And, having read it, he handed it over to his wife.

It ran as follows: "Dear Montgomery,—Things are so frightfully slow here in London that I contemplate taking a company over to the States to play light opera for a period of three months, or longer, beginning in the spring. Your agreement with the Piccadilly people terminates, I think you said, in December, and, if you haven't made arrangements, I should like to secure your services. Name your own terms. I shan't object, as you know. A spell away from town will do you no end of good, and increase your popularity on your return. So just think it over. By the way, I must congratulate you on your marriage. Who's the lady? You must let me call on you both directly you come back to town."

"Well, George, what do you mean to do?"

"Do, darling? Why, go like a shot. You won't mind, will you?" seeing a shade of disappointment come over her face.

"It will be dreadfully lonely."

"Lonely, not a bit of it. Why," laughing aloud, "you surely did not think I meant going without you, did you?"

"I thought that perhaps it wouldn't be convenient," half-crying.

"Not convenient, indeed; why I wouldn't go without you for a million a year!"

"Any other letters to show me, dear?"

"Only these," handing them over, "and they are not much likely to interest you."

She looked at two or three of them, and made a pretty little *moue* of dissent.

"What was that one you put into your pocket just now? You seemed vexed at it, I thought."

"Oh, that," with a short laugh; "only a business communication."

"Do you know, I wish you would let me see it, George?"

"I don't think you would care to, little woman; in fact, you had better not, perhaps."

That settled it.

"Better not. Then it's something you don't care to show me."

"It's only a silly letter from a very silly woman."

"Somebody in your company at the theatre, I suppose."

"No, it's not. Here, you can see it, if you like," fishing it out of his pocket. "I get enough of her, goodness knows."

Mrs. Clifford was only a woman after all, and when she saw that it commenced "Dearest Mr. Montgomery," she felt the blood surge up into her face; but as she proceeded to read further her face became ashy pale, and her hands trembled so she could hardly hold the letter. Briefly, it was a declaration of admiration for her husband, and a hope that the expressive glances he had cast at the writer from time to time during the past season, when she had been in a certain box in the theatre, the exact position of which she described so that there should be no mistake, had not been altogether devoid of meaning.

And then—Mrs. Clifford could scarcely believe her eyes—the letter continued that at a certain hour on a day named, the writer would be in Regent's Park Botanical Gardens, and gave a description of how she would be attired, so that her admirer might be able to easily recognise her, winding up, "yours devotedly, Marion."

With womanly instinct Mrs. Clifford looked for the post-mark and date. It was "London, W.," and the date nearly a fortnight old, so that the time of the appointed assignation had long gone by. There was a ray of comfort in that, at least.

The letter dropped helplessly from her trembling hands, and she burst into tears.

"Oh, George, how dreadful! do you often get letters like that?"

"Tons of 'em, my darling; but what of that? I can't tell people who come to hear me and other members of the company sing and act for their amusement that they must on no account touch the figures—no, no—must not hold any written communications with the people behind the footlights."

"I can understand that quite well, but—but if you didn't attach any importance to that letter, why did you so carefully conceal it from me? Why not have torn it up at once?"

"But, my dear girl, I do attach importance to it"—Dorothy gasped—"and when we get home I can show you a whole boxful of almost similar effusions, some of them rather more silly than this perhaps," reflectively, "but one and all having the same tenour. Can't you understand, little woman," in a gentle tone of voice, "they are to the actor or actress as much credentials to his or her ability as a whole host of printed testimonials would be, and it's only by catering to the public taste that I am able to earn the income that I do, and have gained for a wife the dearest little woman in the world?"

The argument to most minds would have seemed irrefutable, but not so to a newly-made bride of a week only.

"I don't doubt your word for a moment—but what I want to know is, did you—did you—look at this—this woman in the way she suggests?"

"Not knowingly, my dear; but when the exigencies of a play demand that I should be stone blind as to what is going on on the stage, I must look away at the audience, and I can't always be staring at the front row of the gallery, can I, now?"

"It is not always necessary to single out a box with a woman in it, I should imagine!"

"Now, my dear girl, you are surely not going to be jealous, it's too absurd; only just think to yourself, now," looking at the letter, "this silly woman will have kept her selfmade appointment at the Botanical Gardens, only to find the individual to her known as Mr. Montgomery has not thought it worth while to turn up, and after waiting about for a long time in vain, she will probably have realised what an egregious idiot she has been; and yet," contemplatively, "others will do it again, as they have done before, I suppose. I can't help it. You can see that yourself."

Mrs. Clifford was bound to confess that there was nothing more to be said, and the incident ended to all outward appearances. Indeed, she was sensible little woman enough to say that she did not ever want to see any of his "business" correspondence again.

The honeymoon had come to an end, the newly-married couple were duly installed in a cosy little flat in Kensington, which was to be their future home. The theatres had re-opened, amongst them the one in which Mr. Montgomery was engaged, and flaming posters had announced that on such and such a date the noted tenor would resume the *rôle* in which he had earned for himself such unbounded popularity.

Little Mrs. Clifford had prevailed upon her husband to let her witness his resumed triumph, and having obtained a box for her in a good position, she, with an old schoolgirl friend and an attendant cavalier, sat breathlessly awaiting his appearance on the stage. At last, after the manner of fashionable tenors in light comic opera, she heard him announce his on-coming by singing a few bars of the opening song in his part. In another instant he was before her, casting one brief glance of recognition towards the box in which she was seated, he threw his whole energy into his task, and the deafening applause which greeted the conclusion of his song testified beyond doubt the estimation in which the vast audience held him.

In addition to a splendid voice, he was, as he stood there in the centre of the stage, arrayed in a most becoming costume, and his upper lip adorned with a magnificent moustache, which, to all appearance, had grown there, a strikingly handsome man, and Mrs. Clifford could not fail to note the glances of admiration bestowed upon him from the feminine members in the various parts of the auditorium, and she could not help saying to herself that *some* women—she was particular to emphasise the "some"—might be excused for making stupids of themselves about him.

As the opera proceeded she became interested in the development of the plot—her theatre-going experience had been extremely limited—but ever and anon the uncomfortable feeling of her husband's numerous anonymous admirers would be borne in upon her.

"Not that she need mind," she said to herself, "for is he not true to me, and me alone? And to think that an insignificant little person like myself should have been singled out by him to the exclusion of all these grand dames."

In her heart she was not altogether sorry when the curtain fell on the last act, and the principal performers had been called before the curtain.

Mr. Clifford did not keep his wife and her companions waiting long in the brougham, and the whole four were soon speeding westwards. Of the party three were in uproarious spirits, but Mrs. Clifford was silent and reserved, a fact which did not escape her husband's observation, although he had enough tact not to appear to notice it.

When the lady and her escort had been put down at their respective destinations, Mr. Clifford spoke:

"Well, little woman, and how did you like me in my borrowed plumes?"

"I thought the whole thing was just lovely, dear; but I shouldn't care to go often, I think. You must find it dreadfully monotonous singing the same songs night after night."

"Oh! I don't know; one gets used to it in time; but I shan't be sorry of a change in the spring."

"Have you decided to go to America, then?"

"Yes, dear, old X—— came round to the theatre to-night and got me to sign an agreement. He is giving me just double what I am getting now."

"Oh, I'm so glad," clapping her hands delightedly.

"What an avaricious little woman it is," was his laughing reply.

Had he been able to read his Dolly's innermost thoughts, he would perhaps have been surprised to find that it was *not* the idea of increased wealth which was paramount amongst them.

It was when one of these moods were upon her one night, that she hastily went to her writing-table and dashed off a short note to the friend who had shared her box on the occasion of her one and only visit to the theatre.

"Dearest Kitty,—If you have nothing else to do, come over to-morrow evening, and let us have a cosy chat together. It will be quite like old times."

Miss Kitty promptly wrote to say she would come.

For a while after her arrival the conversation was devoted to topics dear to the feminine mind, and then the visitor remarked:

"Wasn't your husband splendid the other night? Do you know, I almost envied you."

"I suppose George is what you would call good-looking, isn't he?"

"Good-looking, my dear, doesn't express it; he's just divine!—when he is on the stage, I mean. Why, before he married you, half the women in London set their caps at him."

"But do they know he is married now, do you think?" was the anxious rejoinder.

"It doesn't matter much whether they do or not, you little goose. Women who go mad after a popular actor don't bother much about his marital relations."

"Oh; do you know, George showed me a letter from someone before he was married, and said he was always getting them, and that he thought nothing of them. Do all actors, do you think, get letters of—of that description?"

"Well, my dear, not all of them, perhaps. Fancy a woman writing to old ————, for instance. But with your husband it's different, you see. Yes, quite different."

"Kitty, you don't mean to say that you ——"

"No! No!! No!!!" laughing, "on my honour. Never did—not to him, anyway," she added, *sotto voce.* But the sentence caught Mrs. Clifford's ear all the same.

"Of course not—but Kitty—you seem to know all about this—this sort of thing. You don't think George ever would ——"

"Would what? Why, you silly little goose, of course he wouldn't. Women write to him—he can't help that—but you take my word for it, he is much too sensible and too fond of you, too, I fancy, to ever bother to reply to them."

"I'm sure of that, dear old George; and yet, do you know, I should like to try him. Only just for a joke, you know, and then I could tell him all about it after, and we could have a good laugh over it."

"My dear Dorothy, do you think you could disguise your writing so that he wouldn't know it? Impossible."

"I don't see the impossibility of it, Kitty. I had no idea" (calmly) "of writing to George myself, but there can be no possible harm or objection in your doing so. It's only a joke, you know."

"Me!"

"And why not? I heard you say just now you had never been guilty of such an indiscretion. 'Not to him, anyway,' were your exact words, I think. So it can't be anything very dreadful for you to undertake, and oh, Kitty" (in a sudden outburst of excitement) "I do so want to be sure, quite, quite sure. I don't doubt George the least bit in the world, you know, but——"

"Well, you have a strange way of showing your implicit trust in him, that's all I can say."

"Now, Kitty, do be reasonable; you don't know what it is to be married, and I do love George so; I can't bear to think that any other woman could ever cause him to forget me even for a moment. Oh, Kitty, the idea of it is awful, too awful to contemplate!"

"There, there, don't cry; give me pen, ink, and paper, and I'll just do it this very minute."

"Have you got any plain paper?"

"Yes; I have some extra glazed in my desk; here it is."

"Yes, this will do"—holding it up to the light—"there is no distinguishing water-mark; one can't be too careful in these matters."

Mrs. Clifford looked at her friend in silent admiration.

"Now, then, what am I to say?"

"How should I know, dear; I thought you would. I mean, you know so much more of the world than I do. You say just what you think best."

Miss Kitty pursed her lips and began to write, and in a few minutes handed over the letter for inspection.

"Dearest Mr. Montgomery,—I may, of course, be mistaken, but it seemed to me the other evening that when singing that charming love song of yours in the second act your glances were directed towards a certain box on the second tier. I will not particularise which until I hear that my suspicions were not absolutely incorrect. I am going to the play again on Monday next; will you let me know what are your favourite flowers; then I will wear them, and if you will say where I can see you afterwards you may rely on my being in good time."

"There, my dear, that ought to do the trick, I think."

"Capital; why it's the very way in which that other woman wrote to him; but hadn't you better sign it? The letter George showed me was signed, I remember."

"Oh, I don't think it matters much; I am sure your husband is much too sensible a man to take any notice of it."

"I am sure he is; but we may as well do the thing properly while we are about it."

"Very well, then, 'Yours devotedly, Florrie.' There's another thing, though. Supposing—I only say supposing, mind you—he should be tempted to reply, we have given no address."

"Ah! I never thought of that," with dismay. "We can't invent an address as well as a name—oh, dear! oh, dear!—and so we can't do it after all."

A curious little smile passed over Miss Kitty's face. "Do you know, I am not at all sure that I am doing right in aiding and abetting you in this matter; but, having begun, I suppose we may as well see it through."

"Well?"

"Well, just this. I believe—in fact, I have heard—that there are certain libraries in London where one can have one's letters addressed. Let me see! Yes, of course. I know; there's Liber's, in Bayswater—not far from our house, you know—and you can come and call on me, and just look in as you pass and see if there any answer."

"Kitty, you are an angel!"

"Perhaps—perhaps not. I don't think it is quite certain."

The address named having been duly added, the two friends, one of them feeling decidedly like a conspirator, together went out and posted the precious missive in an adjacent pillar-box.

"Of course, if no answer comes within a day or two, I shall tell George all about——"

"Not implicating *me*, if you please."

"Of course not—as if I should."

"But supposing he *does* reply, what then?" in a joking tone.

"But he won't," with decision.

The next day, putting on as bold a face on the matter as she could, Mrs. Clifford walked into Liber's, and in a voice not altogether free from emotion, asked if there were any letters for "Florrie." The assistant looked into a pigeon-hole, and in the most matter-of-fact way handed one over to her.

She recognised the handwriting—his handwriting—at a glance, and, hailing the first cab, got in, told the man where to drive, and with trembling fingers opened the envelope.

"Dearest and adorable one,—So you have discovered my secret? It is true that when you are present I seem inspired, and the words I sing have for once a meaning that I never at other times experience. Much as I should like to see you at the theatre on Monday next, I do not think it altogether wise. People are so apt to be curious, and as it is I have had to put up with a certain amount of chaff about Box——. So you see I know who my fair correspondent is. The better plan will be for you to take a cab, and go quietly to the Café à Londres, and ask for private Room No. 8. The door-keeper will have had his instructions, and, if you will pardon my saying so, it will be well to dress as quietly as possible, and you can easily wear a wrap which will conceal your identity to a certain extent. Don't be later than 11.45, as I want to go to a dance after. Yours devotedly, George——"

"The brute! And to sign his own name, too! Monday next, the very night he promised to take me to a dance at the Upton's! Oh, I shall go out of my mind!"

"You look bored, little woman," said George, at dinner a few hours later. "I fancy you stay in by yourself too much. Why don't you go to the theatre some times; Mrs. FitzWilliam would be only to glad to take you any evening."

"Oh, it is a little dull sometimes; but do you know I have got an idea I should like to see you play again just once; it's a fancy I have got. Could you get me a box for next Monday?"

"Very sorry, my dear, but there isn't a seat in the house open for next week."

"You ought to be a very proud man to create such a *furore*. Well, if it can't be managed, some other night will do. By the way, we are asked to Mrs. Upton's dance that night. Can you take me?"

"Of course I can. But don't bother to come to the theatre for me; it only means coming all the way back here again. Their house is close by, you know."

Mrs. Clifford said nothing, but reflected on the duplicity of human nature, and that of the genus man in particular.

On the Monday night, having left word for her husband that she had gone to Mrs. Upton's, just after eleven o'clock she drove in a cab to the Café à Londres. She had been careful to observe the instructions conveyed in the letter, which she had taken the precaution to put in her pocket, and the white woolly wrap wound loosely about her head effectually served to veil her identity.

An obsequious doorkeeper assisted her to alight, and, in response to her somewhat tremulous inquiry for Room No. 8, a waiter with an ivory tablet bearing that number in his coat, came forward and ushered her into a snug little room, on the table of which was an elegant little supper laid for two persons.

She glanced at the clock; it was just 11.45. Now, then, she would not have long to wait; for Mr. Clifford prided himself on nothing more than his punctuality. Still the hands went on, and presently the French clock chimed the hour of twelve, and still he did not appear.

Quarter past, half past, and then she became desperate. She rang the bell. A waiter appeared instantly; so quickly, indeed, that he might have been at the other side of the door.

"There is no other number 8 room, I suppose?" was the only thing that occurred to her.

"No, miss."

Miss, indeed! "Thank you," and the waiter retired.

Mrs. Clifford began to think possibly he had repented after all, and had gone home. If so all was bound to come out. But worse still, how was she to get away from this odious place. The unconsumed supper would have to be paid for, she supposed, and instinctively she took out her purse. Horror of horrors, it contained a few shillings only! Once more she rang the bell; the waiter appeared without delay.

"The gentleman," he began, with a smirk.

"Has he arrived?"

"No, miss; I was going to observe——" but his observation, whatever it might have been, remained unsaid.

"Tell the manager I wish to speak to him, please. I had ah—an appointment to sup here with a gentleman at 11.45, but now I see it's nearly one o'clock, and I fear something must have occurred to prevent my hu——" she had almost said husband, but just managed to substitute the word friend, "from keeping his appointment, and I am sorry to say I have come out without any money, beyond some silver; otherwise I should have been pleased to pay for——"

"Pray do not mention such a thing, madam; mistakes will occur, and the gentleman will doubtless call to-morrow and explain; allow me to have a cab called."

Mrs. Clifford did not know how to be grateful enough to him.

Just as the clock struck two she turned the latch-key in the door of her flat, her feelings being not easily described.

In the dining-room sat Mr. Clifford, in evening dress, reading a book.

She started at the unexpected apparition.

"How early you went away, dear. I was here just before twelve o'clock, and you had gone."

"You did come for me, then, as you promised?"

"Of course I did, little woman; and do you know I had such a queer story to tell you. Ever since I have resumed my part in our show I have been more than ever bothered with letters from inane women, like the one I showed you at Lytham. Well, last week I got an even more than usually venturesome effusion from someone styling herself Florrie. I can't think why I did it, but instead of putting it away unanswered I actually took the trouble to reply to it, making an appointment to sup with her this very night."

"But you didn't mean to go, George?"

"My dear girl, what could have put such an idea into your head? Hadn't I promised to take you to this dance? and I couldn't be in two places at once very well, could I?"

"Of course not, how silly of me."

"Well, as I was saying, I made the appointment, ordered the supper, and, being a stranger, paid for it beforehand, and just mentioned casually to the waiter I might be late, and that he was to show the lady in directly she came."

"Oh, George, and she may be there yet!"

"I don't fancy so. She might have waited a while, and then she would realise she had been duped, and find her way home, a wiser woman, it is to be hoped."

"It was hardly fair to play such a trick, was it?"

"Oh, I don't know; women are such idiots, they must expect to put up with inconveniences sometimes. By the way, do you remember my opening a letter from some girl friend of yours when we were down at Lytham? It struck me the writing was wonderfully like this," producing the fatal envelope.

"Oh, no; it is alike, certainly, somewhat alike, but there is a difference; besides, Kitty would never do such a thing, I'm sure."

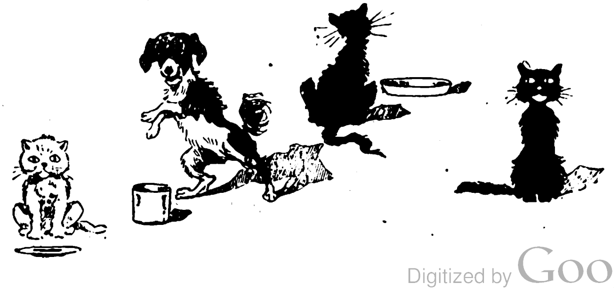
"Well, you know best, little woman, and now I'm going to turn in. Why, you haven't given me a kiss, puss; getting tired of me already?"

"Oh, no, no, George," kissing him passionately, "I can never, never love you enough, I think; but only think of that poor infatuated woman; supposing she is waiting for you still?"

"Serve her right if she is," was the brutal reply. "Now, trot along upstairs; I'll follow you in a couple of minutes, as soon as I get to the end of this cigar."

He re-entered the dining-room and picked up his book. It was Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy." What in the name of all creation could Mr. Clifford find in this book that he should be compelled to stuff a silk handkerchief into his mouth to prevent him exploding with laughter. The writer does not know. Possibly Kitty does.

ANNIE DAVIS



UNFINISHED

THESE pictures!—Well, I see they puzzle you. I never knew any one they didn't. People who have no love of art think them simply absurd, but the artists and you connoisseurs are just puzzled by them. I know what you are saying to yourself:

"'When the man could get qualities like that, could see things in that astounding way, why in the name of all that exists did he not do more? What did he leave his things in that condition for? And what under the sun is the matter with them? I can't pick out one that is not a failure, notwithstanding the delightful colour, and that feeling in their execution which is so delicate and subtle as to be almost uncanny. But there is something wanting, something left undone, as though the hand had been arrested in the making, so that a bit of the soul of the thing had been left out. It is so with the least scrap of a sketch you have here. Curious!"

"Well, I give those pictures that corner of my studio, and I usually let people look and marvel about them, but I have never fully explained them to any one.

"You say you are a metaphysician; that you are interested in the curiosities of human nature. I feel compelled to give you the history of the man who painted them. He was my chum when I was a student in Paris, ten years ago. I did not know him before, though we both were English. His name was Ralph Esby. I shall not soon forget the day Ralph Esby came walking into the studio. We were under Bonnat—a splendid lot of strong men, that class was—Frenchmen, English, Greeks, Danes, Americans, and I don't know what other nationalities. He came walking in, looking like a young god. A tall fellow, of about twenty-three, with a certain slenderness, although rather strongly built. And he had a grace of movement which matched his handsome face. Yet, strange to say, he would sometimes do things in the most awkward and rigid way, as if to contradict the assumption that he possessed this charming grace. For instance, he would throw himself back from his work to give it a critical look with a motion in which there was more of an inspiration to us fellows than in the prettiest model we had. When, suddenly, just as you felt an admiring thrill going over you, especially if you had conceived the enthusiasm for Esby which I had, he would give your æsthetic nerves a shock by drawing himself up rigidly—snap!—as though something had left him. And he'd abandon his work, and off he'd go without a word to anyone.

"We had such a respect for him and his work, though, that no one said much that might look critical. Occasionally a fellow with more callous sensibilities than the usual run of men, would go up to his easel with:

"'Isn't that jolly, now; but, I say, Esby, why don't you finish?'

"He'd just get a little red, smile, with a strange look in his eye—if he had let himself out more you might have called it a hopeless sort of look—and he'd turn off with a joke about something no one ever ventured to notice. This was a personal peculiarity of his. The coat-sleeve of his left arm was empty. It had come from no accident—he had been born without the arm. What he would say was:

"'You can't expect an unfinished fellow to finish his picture.'

"It wasn't in character for him to make a joke of that kind. It rather jarred upon you. We used to wish those 'thick-skins,' would let him alone.

"I attached myself to him from the beginning. I am an enthusiastic person, and naturally express what I feel. But, in spite of my enthusiasm for Esby, which grew daily, there was always something essential lacking in our friendship.

"Evidently he was not a rich fellow, though he never seemed to want for means. He had an atelier, like many of us, and lived at the restaurants. He had no friends in Paris outside our set, and I was the only one there whom he visited intimately. However, the fellows all felt honoured by an invitation to Esby's atelier, and many a good bottle of wine and crust of bread we've broken there.

"There was a piano which Smith used to play, and we had some good voices, too. Esby himself never touched the piano before anyone. Of course, he only had one hand to play with, and yet I've heard him make music, pretty, strange, and beautiful, as I've sometimes come up the stairs, which would stop as soon as he heard my step.

"He was particularly sensitive about his music. A song he never sang through with the fellows, though in particularly fine passages he would often join in, and his voice had a rich quality. But if ever he sang more than a few notes there would be the consciousness of something out of harmony in the singing—something which you did not quite like to hear, though not out of tune or anything of that kind. He would immediately stop himself then, with a slight, impatient movement, and probably not try it again the rest of the evening. There was one subject that we never broached at Esby's. That was the ladies. It always fell flat, and we learnt by-and-bye that either Esby was totally indifferent to the fair sex—his manner implied it—or else he had had a wound from Cupid which was not healed. The fellows speculated somewhat about it.

"Imagine, then, my surprise when I came in on him one evening and found him sitting over his fire with a letter in his hand, which he held in a listless, melancholy way. As he didn't put it away or make any movement to conceal his attitude of mind, the characteristic thing for him to do, of course, I looked at him inquiringly. I said: 'What's up, Esby?' He just handed over the letter, with 'I'm a confounded rascal, Harry,' and then he got up and began pacing the floor.

"The letter was a delicate-scented thing, in a woman's handwriting. It ran thus:

> "My Dear Ralph—You will be surprised to receive this letter so soon after my last, which I posted but two days ago. But that last was like all the letters which I have been writing to you this winter, not a true, frank letter, but a kind of make-believe. And to-day I have determined to tell you all I have been thinking, that once more things may be open and real between us; for your letters, dear Ralph, have been make-believes, too. Indeed, is it not so that our happy frankness had disappeared even before you said farewell? I felt it, though I would not believe it then. I cannot explain—I cannot understand it. Not in regard to you, Ralph. With another person it might be different. Oh! Ralph, my dear Ralph, you still love me?

"The letter was blistered with tears, and there was no signature.

"Esby came over and took it out of my hand, saying: 'I shall write to her to come over, and I'll give it a fair trial. Perhaps it will return to me. I thought it might by absence. But I'm afraid it's like the painting and everything else, I can't put anything more into it. It must be left unfinished. I'm afraid it's constitutional!' And Esby—reserved Esby—actually buried his face in his hands and wept.

"I felt sure that it was the first time he had candidly declared that last even to himself.

"The month following this Esby worked in a particularly spasmodic way, and he was in a more than usually reticent frame of mind. We had no confidential talks, he did not come to my room without one of the other fellows, and I avoided surprising him alone in his.

"But one evening he came in with the expression of dejected determination, which had been growing on his face for six weeks, a good deal deepened.

"'Bright,' he said, 'I'd like you to meet some friends of mine—Miss Hartley and her father—just come over.'

"I understood who Miss Hartley was, and I was somewhat agitated by the invitation. After all it was only a formal call we made, but I came away feeling that if Ralph could cease to love Madge Hartley there must be something normally wrong about him.

"For a whole week Ralph and I saw Mr. Hartley and his daughter. We showed them Paris—Ralph devotedly attended the lady, and I piloted the old gentleman. He and I kept up a pretty even flow of spirits and conversation, but Ralph and his lady were a melancholy pair.

"Her father was not an observant person, but even he began to think there was that in the atmosphere beyond his ken, and he confided to me that he thought there must be something amiss between young Esby and his daughter. They used to be famous friends.

"By Saturday morning I felt that I could not keep an indifferent look upon things any longer. Those two faces haunted me tragically when they were not before my eyes. I called for Esby about nine o'clock. We were to take his friends to Versailles by boat. A pleasant plan enough for people in real holiday humour.

"A second time Esby sat dejectedly in his room with a letter in his hand.

"He rose and said, quickly: 'You'd better go to the class, Bright, and hear the criticism. Miss Hartley is not well, and we shall not go to Versailles. It's a shame to have kept you from work all this week—but you're a good fellow, Bright, a stunning good fellow,' and Esby shook my hand with great warmth.

"'Shan't we call or send some flowers, Ralph?' said I.

"'No,' he replied; 'I'll write her a note.'

"I did go up to the atelier, but my thoughts were not much upon what Bonnat was saying, although the other fellows seemed more than usually interested. They twitted me a bit about having been kept away by one of the fair sex. 'We might have expected it of an enormous creature like you, Bright; but what's taken hold of Esby?' I wasn't in a joking nor confiding humour, so I muttered something about Esby attending to his own affairs, and I went off for a walk by the Seine. I'm not often irritable, but the fellows jarred on me.

"Esby rested on my mind, and I thought of Madge Hartley, shut in her room in this strange city, sad, despairing thoughts haunting her. Towards evening I wandered up to Ralph's room. Pinned upon the door was a paper, and on it written: 'Go in, Bright.' I quickly turned the handle and entered.

"The room was entirely vacant, but opposite me stood a portrait of Esby—a portrait which I had never seen, yet immediately recognised as done with the most exaggerated peculiarities of his brush; so strangely like my friend was it, yet a weird thing, uncanny, ghostly. He never did a piece of work more beautiful in colour, and full of a wonderfully strange inspiration. But the sadness and despair which shone through its ghostliness was so great that it was with a heart stilled by premonition that I read a word painted beneath with a slender brush of carmine. This was the word, 'Unfinished.'

"I stood some time gazing upon the portrait in a blind kind of way, repeating mechanically, 'Unfinished!' And gradually the terrible fear grew that Ralph had done something desperate. Poor Ralph! No one in his sane mind ever painted a portrait like that.

"I rushed up to the Hartley's. Mr. Hartley received me with a grave face, and gave me a letter.

"It was a letter from Ralph to Madge. He told her frankly what he had told me—the whole course of his feelings towards her:

> "'And now,' he said, 'if you were a woman to receive such a thing I should offer myself as your husband, but to you I am well aware that would be useless. Many years ago the suspicion of this strange peculiarity of my nature dawned upon me—this incapacity for completion, in any condition or acting of my life. I have been ever since warding off an acknowledgment of it to myself. How much braver, how infinitely better a thing it would have been to have acknowledged it, the pain which I have brought upon you and upon myself is witness. I cannot even ask you to forgive me.
>
> "'Yet you will not deem that I am without realisation of what I have done, when I tell you that I have gone into banishment—a man without an arm, symbol of the incomplete. It is not the ending of a miserable life I am contemplating. It is but complete retirement from life as it is, its daily contact with my fellow men. In the wilderness of some primitive land, perhaps a kindly providence will some day say 'Finished.'

"It is ten years since I read that, and that's the last I've seen of Ralph Esby. I've heard that his father was killed in a duel, shot in the arm, and that his mother died when he was born, soon after. One can put two and two together in regard to poor Ralph's peculiarities. All these years we have been wondering where Ralph might be, but the uncertainty came to an end a year since, when a fellow from Australia came into my studio and handed me a card, upon which was written, in a feeble hand, 'Harry, my boy, I've finished!'

"'It was a wild colt finished him,' said the man.

"Miss Hartley? Oh, she had a severe illness. But her father and I nursed her through.

"For six years I did not say anything to her in regard to the state of my feelings. Then I asked her to be my wife, and we've been married four years now.

"I wish we could have told Ralph."

Richard Sibest.

IT CAME TO PASS

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM

CHAPTER IX.

Charlotte received a telegram forestalling Raymond's arrival. Her joy quite equalled the sender's, as she sought Hugh with a radiant gleam of pleasure in her eyes, waving the glad tidings aloft.

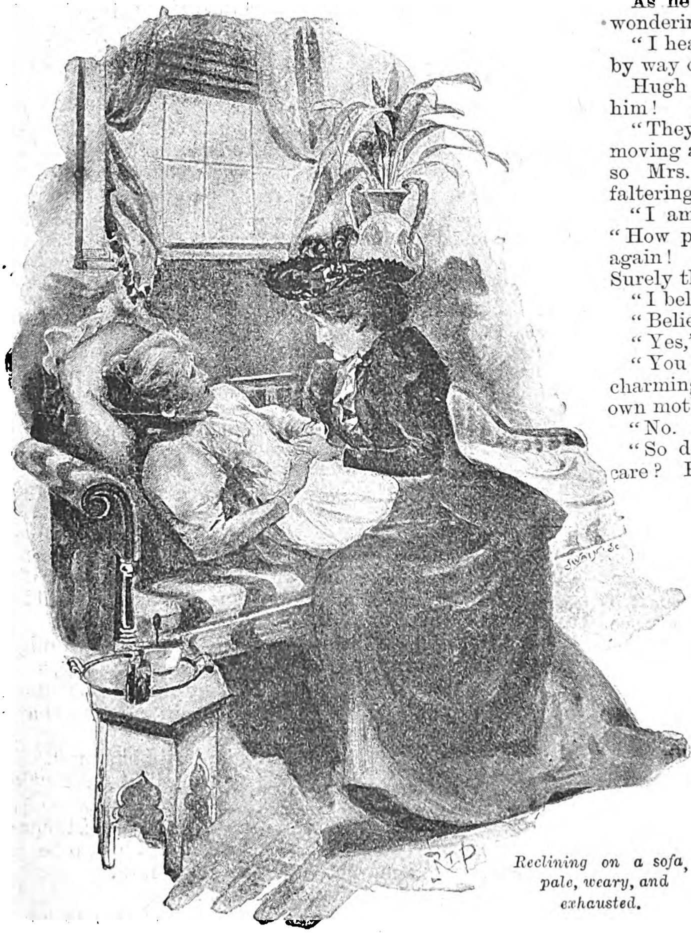
"He is coming," she cried, joyfully, with almost childish excitement. "Oh! Hugh, dear, I am so glad!"

Their beaming faces flushed and glowed as they re-read his message together.

"How I shall count the hours to meeting him!" she sighed, her heart overwhelming with gratitude and content.

It had all seemed like an evil dream to Charlotte, and a great load fell from her shoulders, as she carried a bouquet of roses to Mrs. Leigh, who was reclining on a sofa, pale, weary, and exhausted.

"How thoughtful of you to bring coloured flowers," she said, pressing them lovingly to her cheek. "The white blossoms look so funereal, and there will be time enough for them by-and-bye."



Reclining on a sofa, pale, weary, and exhausted.

"Oh! do not speak so gloomily!" cried Charlotte. "I fancy the doctor here is an alarmist, for Nurse Evelyn is very hopeful, and declares you are a 'splendid patient!'"

"Dear little soul! She is always bright, yet so quiet, and tricks me into believing myself better. I don't think I care whether I live or die, the last twenty years have been so full of sorrow. Death is sometimes a release."

"Would you like to see Hugh? Nurse said we might sit with you, and he is waiting outside to hear how you are."

"Oh! do call him in!" she exclaimed eagerly. "I should love it above all things."

Hugh came gladly, thinking of his own illness, and the lonely suffering.

As he entered, Mrs. Leigh gazed at him with the same wondering expression she had worn on the first night.

"I hear you are expecting your father shortly," she said, by way of conversation. "Are you considered like him?"

Hugh coloured. How *could* he admit he had never seen him!

"They have the same eyes," murmured Charlotte, moving across the room to arrange the flowers. As she did so Mrs. Leigh lowered her voice, addressing Hugh falteringly.

"I am so glad that Mrs. Peel is happy," she whispered. "How pleased you will be to have your father with you again! His wife is a different woman at the mere prospect. Surely they are wonderfully devoted?"

"I believe so."

"Believe! Are you not certain?"

"Yes," answered Hugh emphatically.

"You must have a very delightful home with such a charming step-mother, or perhaps you still remember your own mother?"

"No. She died when I was an infant."

"So during your childhood you never knew a mother's care? Poor little boy!"

Tears filled her eyes, as she held out her hand sympathetically.

Charlotte returned to her seat by the couch, and noticed a hungry hunted look on Mrs. Leigh's face, such as she had seen stamped on the features of men who race behind luggage-laden vehicles. The invalid shivered in the sunshine as if an icy blast had struck her.

"Are you cold?" asked Mrs. Peel.

"No," she replied, drawing her fleecy shawl about her throat. "I don't think I am really cold, but I said just now I did not care to live—you remember?"

Charlotte bent her head in assent.

"Well, I take back my words. I shivered just then at the thought of death."

She spoke slowly and with effort.

"Have you no home?" Hugh was constrained to ask.

"Not now. I was once a happy young wife like Mrs. Peel, with life before instead of behind me. Then I had a beautiful house, standing in a high-walled garden, and dogs and horses and carriages of

A happy young wife like Mrs. Peel.

my own; but lately I have wandered from one Pension to another, till I grew to know the courses and the conversation by heart, and the smell of the cooking and the shape of the rooms, and the position of the bed, and the people.

"Yes, the people were the worst of all. They could only talk of their own affairs—not one wasted a moment to sympathise with me. They were indeed a contrast to you and your step-mother. Then when I knew I could only live a few months, I gave up economising, and came to this hotel. My good angel must have led me here, but it is sad to make friends, only to part."

Charlotte bent over the tear-stained cheek, and kissed it lovingly.

"You must not talk too much," she whispered, "or nurse won't let us stay. Shall I read to you?"

"Yes, if you don't mind. I prefer poetry, it soothes my nerves."

She drew a little red book from under her pillow, entitled, "Lays and Lyrics," by Clement Scott.

"These are my favourites," she said. "Read me one verse, the first you come to, and I will close my eyes and listen."

As the shadows deepened into twilight Charlotte read softly, while Hugh sat watching the wan face on the couch with unspeakable awe. He had never seen death, and the grim spectre hovering over their new friend chilled his blood.

Charlotte's voice was naturally low and musical, and she murmured the lines slowly, hoping the patient might fall asleep:

"What was your life ten years ago?
  You woman with the haunting face;
With eyes so soft and voice so low,
  Who came in fancy to this place.
You touched my face and took my hand,
  And whispered of a life to be,
Some day in distant flower-land,
  When calling you would answer me.
What was the hope that seemed to grow,
In dreams of you ten years ago?"

"No—it was not ten—twenty!" cried Mrs. Leigh starting up with staring eyes. "*Twenty* years ago!"

CHAPTER X.

"No one in the whole world could be happier than I am to-day!" whispered Charlotte, glancing from her husband's loving eyes to the smile of peaceful content upon Hugh's face.

She felt justly proud of uniting these two lives, and a great joy reigned in her heart at the complete success of her plans.

"You gave me a terrible period of suspense," Raymond declared, turning to his wife and laying his hand tenderly on hers.

"And finally my letter was brought to you in church," she replied, gazing at him with her soul in her eyes. "I think it was a good omen, dear, don't you?"

"Perhaps."

"I did not want you to be miserable," she continued, "and yet I am glad it was not a theatre. It is so nice to be missed."

"My tyrant conscience gave me no time for amusement," he replied; "and even now I hardly dare look away from you, for fear you should vanish again. Anyhow, darling, I deserved to suffer, and your mind may be easy on one point. I can see that Hugh and I are not going to quarrel over any miserable misunderstandings. He is the best of sons, since he forgives those long years spent apart, for the sake of our sweet peacemaker—Charlotte Peel." He kissed her hand as he spoke.

"It was almost worth the separation to be reunited," she said, realising how passionately in love she was still with her husband.

Hugh slipped quietly away, knowing they would like to be alone. So engrosssd was he with his own thoughts, that he never saw Nurse Evelyn on the staircase, and woke from his reverie with a start at the sound of her voice.

"Have you a minute to spare?" she asked.

"Yes. Can I do anything for you?"

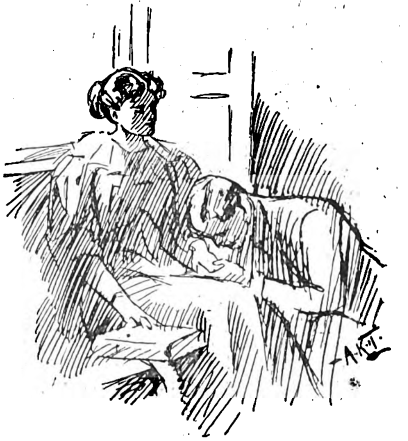
"Mrs. Leigh wants you to bid her good-bye. She is convinced that she will die before the morning. I promised to tell you, she begged so hard."

"I will come," he answered, gravely.

It was a summons he could not disobey.

In the meanwhile, Raymond and Charlotte unburdened their hearts to each other, and perfect confidence reigned between them.

"We will live a newer, freer life dear," she said, a glad light leaping into her eyes. "The barrier between us is broken down now I know everything."



He kissed her hand as he spoke.

He had recounted to her his quarrel with Augusta, and a smile played round Charlotte's lips as he spoke of Mrs. Donnington-Bain's threatening letter.

"You do not fear that woman, Raymond?"

"No. But she nearly drove me frantic refusing to reveal the boy's address, and laughing at my misery. Then when I disregarded her, she fired off an insane epistle, which I did not condescend to answer."

"What is this unknown evil she speaks of?"

"I do not know, but certainly nothing that need trouble you. It probably merely exists in her melodramatic brain."

"She is the sublimity of ignorance and impertinence," laughed Charlotte.

"I received a sarcastic telegram from her, declaring she would tell 'her news' before the week closes. It is only a trick to obtain money."

"Let her proclaim our story on the housetops," cried Charlotte, with a defiant shrug of her shoulders. "I do not care. We are happy together in our love, and the world, or rather the people in it, cannot interfere with our lives. We will be utterly free."

"You could say nothing to please me more," he replied. "You took me 'for better, for worse,' Charlotte, and have remained staunch even through slander, not only drawing me to my son, but rescuing his life at a critical moment."

"There is still a shadow over this brightest of bright days," she replied, "which is troubling me, Raymond. Since our arrival we have been deeply interested in a forlorn lady dying in this hotel. It seems such a very sad case! She has no friends, and Hugh and I cheer her in any little way we can. To-day she is sinking fast, yet still takes a keen interest in all our doings. I must not forget her in the midst of my own happiness."

"I wondered," she continued, slipping her hand in his, "whether you would come and see her? I think it might be kind. We need only stay a few minutes."

"You are always thoughtful for others, Charlotte," he said, tenderly. "But is she strong enough to see a stranger?"

"Oh, yes, just say a few words, and show interest. That is what she craves, poor soul."

Raymond followed willingly, as Charlotte led the way to 149, creeping with gentle footsteps to the door and opening it cautiously.

"May we come in, Nurse?" she whispered. "I have brought my husband to see Mrs. Leigh."

"You must talk very little," Nurse Evelyn replied.

"The young gentleman is here. She asked to see him." They entered noiselessly. The blind was lowered, casting queer shadow's over the patient's face.

"Is she asleep?" asked Mrs. Peel.

"No," whispered the nurse. "I heard her speak a moment since."

Raymond approached the sofa at a sign from Charlotte, and the dying woman opened her eyes, staring at him wonderingly. She stretched out her wasted arms, her figure trembling like an aspen leaf, while suddenly there poured from her lips a torrent of incoherent words.

Charlotte watched the ghastly face unheedful of Raymond.

"At last!" moaned the feeble voice—"at last—husband—forgive me!"

"Her mind is wandering," said Nurse Evelyn, anxiously.

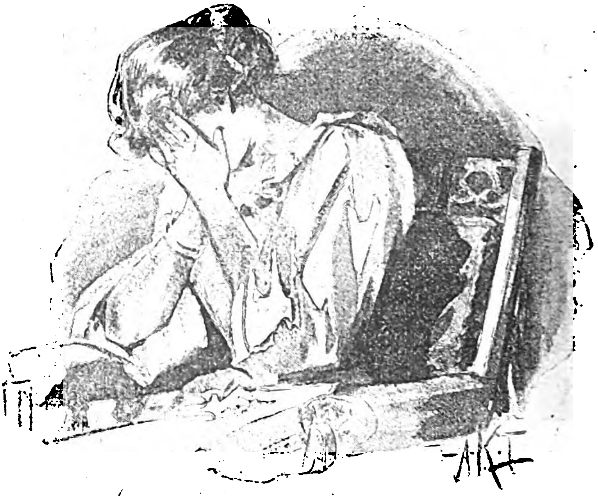
"And she mistakes Raymond——" began Charlotte, but her sentence was interrupted by wild disjointed phrases.

"Heaven has sent you. Bless me—my husband—bless me—and forgive me before I die. Let me feel your hand in mine—your kiss upon my cheek. Oh, Heaven! the crime—the crime—it was red—all red. Look at the boy! He is not stained—but pure as the free air—nearly twenty years—twenty years since that awful day. Husband—good-bye! God bless you!"

She fell forward with a sharp cry, as Raymond caught her in his arms. The frail form stiffened, and the horrible struggle of death took place. Charlotte hid her face, while Nurse Evelyn moved hastily between them.

"It is over," she whispered, when Raymond staggered back.

"Are you ill, Raymond?" Charlotte asked, leading him away. "Is anything the matter? She might almost have been your wife, you look so white and faint!"



Charlotte hid her face.

He gazed at her a moment, while great drops of perspiration stood out on his brow. Then he grasped her arm in a frenzy of uncontrollable emotion.

"Charlotte!" he cried, in a voice that froze her. "You have spoken truly. God knows *how*, but that woman *was* my wife!"

CHAPTER XI.

The tragic life in 149 had ended, yet its latter history was revealed that same evening in the promised letter from Mrs. Donnington-Bain.

Charlotte read it with aching eyes—Charlotte who had no real right to the name of Peel. It was a heartless epistle from a heartless woman.

Dear Raymond,—You might have avoided the shame and disgrace of a surprising revelation had you accepted my terms and not flouted my warning. Now you have only yourself to thank for the knowledge. The startling fact you force from me is that my sister—your wife—still lives! You believed she met a felon's death when you fled to the wilds of Africa. You had not the courage to wait or you would have heard of her reprieve. While *you* cast off the burden she dragged out her weary twenty years in prison. However, I still give you a chance of keeping this secret from your Charlotte, but you must pay for it. Double the allowance you have been making me, or she and the whole world shall know the truth! Do you now realise you are in the clutch of Augusta Donnington-Bain?

How little she knew that her plot was foiled, and powerless to destroy.

* * * * * *

Once more Charlotte and Raymond knelt before the altar, and when they returned to England her name was really Charlotte Peel.

The End.

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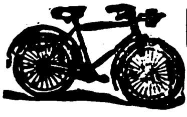

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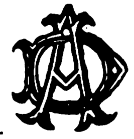

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ATOMS AND ORGANISMS.

Mr. Kingdon Clifford, the brilliant young scientist whose death at Madeira several years ago was properly regarded as a loss to the circle of original investigators, affirmed that atoms flew about in the air of an ordinary room at the exact rate of seventeen miles per minute. How he could know that fact no other scientist has ever pretended to understand, as an atom is defined to be a particle of matter so small as to be beyond recognition by the senses. Yet isn't the custom of explaining the existence of certain diseases by attributing them to the action of "micro-organisms" almost as far-fetched? Take a simple illustration:

In October, 1891, Mr. James Miles, of Brown's Lane, Bright Waltham, Wantage, Berks, had a severe attack of influenza which left him very feeble and languid. He had a foul taste in the mouth, and his tongue and teeth were so coated with a slimy phlegm that he says he could scarcely get his lips apart. In a little time his skin turned a deep yellow, the whites of his eyes being tinged with the same colour. His appetite was very poor, and after every morsel he ate he suffered intense pain at the chest and around the waist. "On occasions," says Mr. Miles, "this pain amounted to agony; what I endured because of it is beyond my power to describe. It continued for hours."

This, of course, was the result of a nervous reaction from some deep-lying cause. But what was the cause? Was it a sequence of influenza, or something very different? Let us hear him a little further.

"I was much troubled with flatulency," he continues, "and my heart fluttered and throbbed until I became alarmed."

Certainly this cardiac disturbance could not have been set up by any "micro-organisms," as every physiologist knows. The stomach, expanded by gas, pressed against the heart and disordered its action. This was a purely mechanical trouble—but whence arose the gas? it is not, surely, a symptom of influenza.

"I got little sleep day or night," says Mr. Miles, "and was so restless that I tossed about the bed all night long. Cold clammy sweats broke out all over me, and I trembled and shook from head to foot. I had a harassing cough, and spat up quantities of thick phlegm, and my breathing was short and hurried."

This looked like asthma; in fact, the presence of consumption was inferred from it by some observers. Yet the outcome of the case discredited this view.

"I rapidly lost flesh," he writes, "and became so weak that I was unable to speak aloud, and so nervous that I could not bear to be spoken to. Gradually I sank lower and lower until my breathing became so difficult that *for three weeks I sat before the fire* night and day, powerless to move. When at last they got me to bed I remained there propped up with pillows. The doctor allowed me to take liquid food only, saying my heart was diseased and I must be careful.

"I got as weak as it is possible for a man to be and live. Many times I thought I must die."

When we consider his excessively debilitated condition, the last paragraph of Mr. Miles's letter becomes of public interest and importance. Here it is, word for word:

"In this state I continued until Easter of 1892, when a friend brought me a bottle of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. After I had taken this medicine for a week I felt great relief. I could eat, and my food gave me strength. I kept on taking it and got stronger daily. When I had used two bottles I was well and strong as ever in my life, and have been so ever since. This remedy saved my life, and I wish others to know it. I therefore not only consent to the publication of this statement, but will gladly answer inquiries. (Signed) James Miles."

Mr. Miles is a man well known and thoroughly respected in his district, and the facts as he gives them are supported by Mr. William Jordan, Postmaster at Bright Waltham, and by many others.

But a word of comment is called for. The influenza is, no doubt, primarily caused by impurity of the blood, and developed by exposure acting upon pre-existing weakness; and both the weakness and the blood poison are caused by indigestion and dyspepsia, the only disease from which our friend suffered—influenza being an incident and symptom.

Thus we see that to fathom most diseases it is not necessary to trouble our heads about invisible forces in the atmosphere, as the seeds germinate in the stomach—not in the air. To remember this fact and act upon it will prove a matter of public and personal good sense. To guard against influenza keep the digestion in order and the body well nourished. Prevent indigestion by using Mother Seigel's Syrup on the first sign of its approach.

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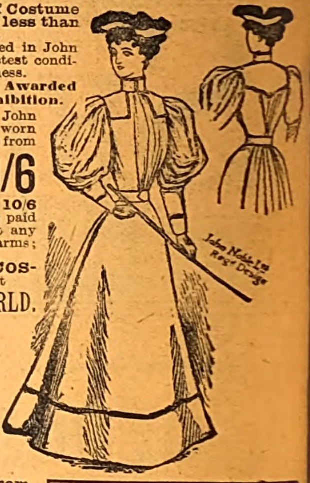

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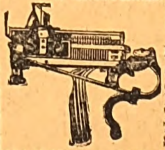

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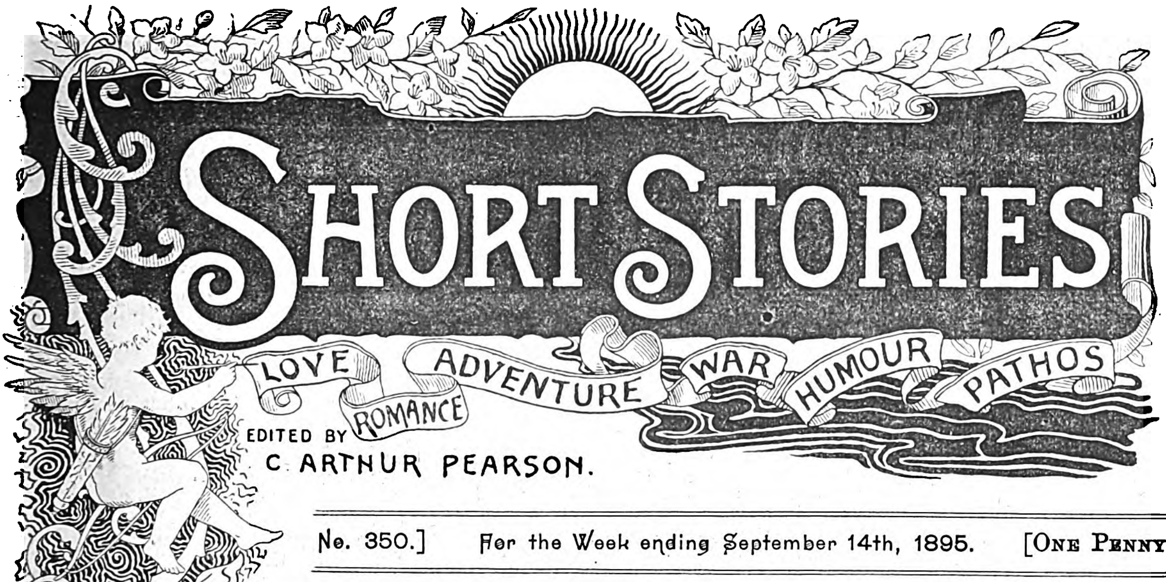

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 350.] For the Week ending September 14th, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

Merely Coincidence.

THE STORY OF A WITHHELD RUPEE.

I.

"PROTECTOR of the poor, from your wealth, which is boundless, look upon your servant with pity."

"You unmitigated old scarecrow, what do mean by coming to the door of my tent, and doing your abominable gymnastic tricks to offend my eyes? Be off! Do you understand? We give nothing to such as you, you hoary old heathen scamp."

"Of your pity, have pity, sahibs, give a very little unto your servant for his daily needs."

"Take yourself off, old pig, and son of fifty thousand pigs. Comprehendest thou what I say? Pollute no longer the sight of my eyes by thy most hideous presence; it is unto my blood as rennet unto the milk of thy most sacred cow. Be off! I have not the smallest intention of bestowing a single anna upon you, or allowing one of these sahibs to do so, though thou stayest a century of years entreating before me."

Seven Englishmen were sitting in the door of a spacious tent, which had that day been pitched for them in a clearing of the jungle; a hanging lamp swung behind them, and on the table were cigar boxes, decanters of wine, and glasses.

They had dined comfortably, and an excellent day's sport had been the topic of their conversation, until out of the gloom of the fast gathering night had crept the gaunt figure of this fakir, who had squatted himself down before them, and interrupted everything by his monotonous appeal for alms.

Apparently, the old fellow spoke English with a certain facility from the fluency with which he begged, yet he seemed not to comprehend that his demand was rejected, or his person vituperated, as he calmly turned his wrinkled old face with placid composure from one man to another, and went on in a gentle, persuasive monotone with his appeal:

"Protectors of the poor." He held out a little dirty wooden bowl, and seemed to watch for a look of relenting in the eye of anyone. "Look upon your servant, protectors of the poor."

He caught the eye of a fair-haired, sunburnt English lad this time, and made a little involuntary movement forward, as of hope realised, and extended his bowl.

The boy drew back, all the more ashamed of himself because he knew that he had contemplated the venerable beggar with sympathy for the space of one second, and he hated the idea that the other men should consider him soft.

"I have looked at you till I'm sorry for myself," said the boy mockingly. "Where do you hail from? What do *you* want with the 'oof-bird? There ain't no shops nor shows out here in the wilderness. I never was any good at the collecting-bag game, my old friend. Try Bailey, now; he's a soft-hearted chap."

Two or three of the men laughed in a comfortable and subdued way, as if they might find some humour in this observation if they could so far trouble themselves as to be amused; and the old fanatic listened to their mirth and watched their faces with interested, eager eyes, and crouched a little closer up to them, squatting on his heels.

A man blew rings out from the smoke of his cigarette, and watched them melt into the motionless air. Another refilled a pipe and struck a match, which blazed up, and burnt out on the grass where he threw it, while his wicker chair creaked uneasily as he crossed and recrossed his legs, and there was the bubbling sound of a man drawing deeply at a pipe which was a trifle foul,

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and but for such sounds an absolute stillness reigned, while, nothing daunted, the man of mystery sat on.

He was a very venerable old fellow, unusually tall of stature, with thin limbs of the hue of well-polished ancient oak, and his small tufts of snowy hair and the white garment twisted around his body were the most conspicuous objects about him against the background of the night. He was irritatingly patient, and once again he varied his silent persistence by a softly murmured monosyllable of entreaty. The situation became embarrassing.

"Well, you're a pretty object, aren't you?" spoke the boy again, turning round upon his elbow on the arm of his great wicker chair to address the ancient man.

"I wonder, now, if your mother knows you're out so late? What's her candid opinion of you, hey? Can't you do any tricks for the money, then? Turn yourself into a mango tree, or some such trifle, and we might entertain your application, you know. Stand on your head, then, merely for argument's sake, to prove that you're genuine, and the wealth of my waistcoat pocket shall instantly be yours."

The young fellow put a thumb and finger into his watch-pocket, and held up a coin. For a moment the old fakir mistook him. He drew out a long dark arm quickly towards the money, and they saw the whites of his eyes as he raised them to the foolish boy's face.

"No, no, not by any means so cheap! We must have a trick first. You chaps are such swells at these things. Merely tie yourself into a knot for my pleasure, and the bawbee shall be yours."

"Don't take notice of him, Durward. If you chaff him, we shall have the filthy old beast prowling round here all the night. You've no idea what a nuisance these begging fakir chaps can make of themselves among the servants. The men live in awe of them, and they'll lay hands on anything for the sake of satisfying them. A chap like that has no personal property, you know, but he makes a thundering good thing out of begging. Be off, now! Depart, thou hoary impostor, from the door of the tent of the Englishman, whose charity begins and ends at home! And, mark thou my words, let me not hear of thee as interfering with one among the least of all my servants while the camp is here, or I will see thy face again, and the form of my visage then thou shalt never forget."

The old visitor had listened with mild-eyed interest; but he comprehended now full well. And, at length, he rose slowly, drawing out his long, snake-like limbs, until he stood before them at his full and extraordinary height, a venerable and gaunt object, scarcely human at all.

"Out of pity for yourselves, sahibs have pity, for thy servant serveth no master but one," he said, speaking still in his insinuating monotone, and holding his little alms-bowl again before each man.

One and all the seven Englishmen went on smoking, or reading, or dozing, and took no notice of him.

He waited; slowly eyeing them, his inexhaustible patience seeming to linger with a sort of pity for them over this, their last, opportunity. Then, suddenly, the dirty little alms-bowl seemed somehow to vanish from the extended hand of the old man, and he raised his bare, long arm:

"The curse of Salii Lal Pal shall rest upon the head of every man in the door of this tent," said he slowly, in the same monotonous, yet incisive voice.

"To-night has the All-Merciful sent here to you his servant, and you bid him go from you with empty hands." He extended the shrivelled palms, and exhibited their bareness; and then, with a finger of his right hand, he counted the Englishmen.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven; the number of Judgment. Hear me now, sahibs, lords of this earth. Again in three years—three, the number of Fate—will I cross the paths that ye walk, and I will make inquiry for ye, and men shall tell me that from every one of ye Death hath taken what ye would not give to-night. It is the curse of Salii Lal Pal, the servant of the All-Merciful. He has spoken by His servant. His word goeth not back."

Before the Englishmen seemed to have finished hearing him the mysterious old man had vanished into the night.

"That's beastly grim and nasty on the part of the old gentleman," said the boy who had chaffed him, examining his pipe uneasily; "why didn't you let me shut his mouth up with a rupee, Colonel?"

"I hate to hear one of those old bags of mystery say a thing like that, myself," observed the man they called Bailey, very thoughtfully; "one hears stories so often from fellows about warnings like that coming true, somehow. They are not comfortable hearing; confound the old ghoul."

"What idiots you men are to take notice of such tomfoolery! If one of you now were to whistle the recall, the old buffoon would come out of his hiding and take an anna from Tommy, there, who was the prime offender, and who'll go first assuredly, when the curse begins to work. Tommy, he'd assure you a thousand years of life, even now, I'm convinced, for the consideration of double fees, only I'll not have the old hound brought back to add to your natural years one half-hour. Come, won't some of you men make up a rubber? That old ghoul isn't going to begin his work of destruction by spoiling our evening, I presume. Bailey, you ought to be seeing if Chuder has got Wilson's tiger skinned yet. The chap's morally convinced that the beast's ears are his lawful spoil, if there isn't someone to look after him."

II.

"Looks as if that old ghoul meant his evil words to come true," said Durward next day, when they carried into camp Wilson mortally injured in a gun accident. "Poor old Wilson, it's rough on him that he should have first turn."

And the party that returned to Burrapur went back only six men strong, not counting the servants who bore between them a melancholy something which once had been a living, hoping, pleasure-loving man.

For a while society in Burrapur was shadowed by the gloom of that mournful return, and everyone spoke nicely and feelingly concerning Wilson. Then the gay season of the place came on, and boiling seething water cannot retain on its surface the ripples of a splash, however big.

"Poor Wilson" ceased to be a topic of conversation, and if the dead man could have learned from the weird fakir that secret so profoundly hid of "how to come back and be forgiven," he might have found that the balance of pardons lay all on the wrong side, which he doubtless would have overlooked, having been a man who understood his world.

They play polo a great deal at Burrapur during the cool weather, and that season two very serious mishaps took place upon the polo ground.

One man was killed on the spot, and another received a blow in a vital part, which, however, for the sake of everyone he made light of at the time.

He got invalided on account of it, by-and-bye, and went home to England, from whence, later on, came news of his death.

"I tell you, Barbour, I feel like a doomed man," said Tommy Durward, when reading his newspaper; "both those poor chaps were with us up in the camp, and heard the curse of that old fool. Look at that accident to Wilson, too! How he lay on the little camp-bed and watched us, and knew it was all up. Goodness knows now whose turn's got to come next."

"Hum—goodness knows, and goodness don't need to be helped out in its nasty tricks upon humanity by a dirty old heathen fakir."

"Don't talk that way, Barbour. I wish you wouldn't. I call it an uncommon awful thing to have to die——"

"You've got to, my dear chap."

"So've you, old boy; but not within three years, please God—that's a bit too soon for you or me," and Thomas Durward, Esq., of Her Majesty's Native Cavalry, looked desperately seriously out of his very blue eyes, and thought of a certain girl he knew. Perhaps he may have recalled the confident words of Barbour, and his round, jolly face, when the troop-ship carrying him home to England next spring struck in a fog upon the treacherous Portuguese coast, and, giving very little time for thought to anyone, settled down among the relentless breakers with nearly every hand on board.

"There's only three of us left now," said ungrammatic Tommy ruefully to the girl of his heart, recounting to her the story of the fakir's grim prophecy on the day when the news of the loss of the *Caspian* and Barbour's death reached Burrapur.

"I decline *positively* to be your widow, Tommy. You must live long enough to attend my funeral, and be my mourner, or I'll never, never have you, you silly boy," the girl protested, though Durward's story had started an uneasy sensation at her heart.

"Darling," Tom said, in a voice which signified everything, even to undertaking to fulfil these last offices for her, when the needful time arrived.

"You don't really believe it, Tommy? Not really? It's merely coincidence. You only tell me to tease me?"

"I don't believe anything ever, my Lilla, except that I love you, and can't live without you. I couldn't die ever, Lilla, if you were by, I think." Such very foolish young people were these.

It is needless to tell by what means the lives of old Colonel Howard or of the other surviving men were ended. Suffice it to say, that within the time limited by the fakir, there was promotion into their shoes for juniors of the regiment.

Meantime, the infatuated Tommy Durward was married, and apparently lost account of time.

It was only on the last night of the fatal three years that the recollection of the grim curse, which still might be said to hang over him, recurred to his mind.

He was at his club in Burrapur, and had to ride out half a mile or so to his bungalow and his wife.

"Good Heavens!" thought the young fellow, in an agonised way, as he suddenly noticed the date; "if there's any truth in that old heathen's prophecy, it'll come true to-night, and there's little Lilla at home."

"I'm going to ride a bit of the way out with you," said a friend to him, when he was mounting at the club-house door. "The air of the hills out your way'll be cool, perhaps, after the heat of a day like to-day."

"I'll be very glad of your company," Tommy said, and they trotted together out of the town and along the broad track of the moonlit road towards the hills in the direction of Durward's place.

The light was very clear and silver-like, and their horses were made a trifle nervous by the blackness of the shadows that were cast upon the road.

"Steady, there!" cried the man riding with Durward, for his animal had reared right upon its haunches till it almost lost its balance and fell back. It righted itself, however, and stood trembling and snorting with fear.

"What was it?" asked the man, appealing to his companion, as he thought the scuffling of horses' feet he had heard had been only those of his own mare. He looked, and Tommy Durward and his mount had disappeared. Then he urged his own terrified animal up the road; perhaps two hundred yards or more an unaccountable dark patch lay out in the midst of a flood of moonlight.

"Tommy—Tommy Durward, is that you?" He stopped, bent over and listened, and then dismounted in haste.

The curious thing about it was that Durward never felt any sensation of pain. He was acutely alive to all that went on around him, though his spine was dislocated, and his body paralysed.

"Gone, yes—over that way. It's no use going after him. He came to tell me the time was up. I'd had the longest of them all. Your mare was frightened, too. I knew what it meant when I saw him by the road-side. To-day was the last of those three years—and this is the end. Could you go and tell Lilla? It's not far from here. Don't frighten her; say it's only a little accident at first. But if she'd come here to me I might have a little longer time than if you tried to move me to her. No, I don't mind being left—only be quick. Once I told her I couldn't die if she were with me."

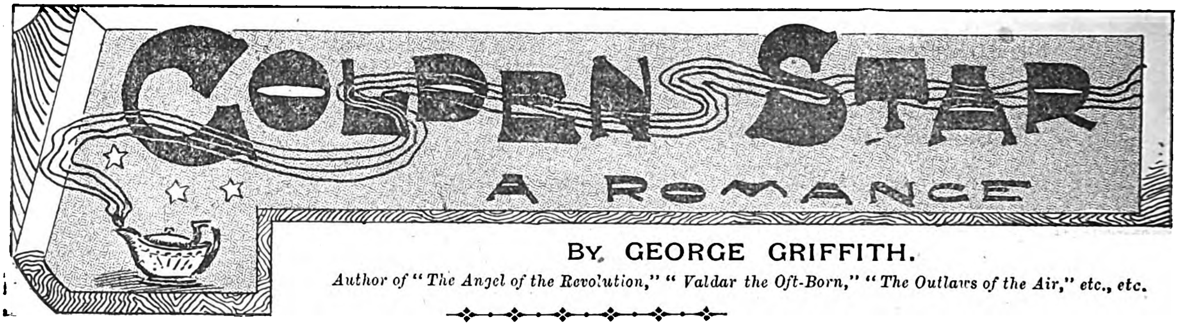
The man touched Durward's hand, and then was gone, and in less than a quarter of an hour came hastening back in company with a little, terror-stricken woman, with a shawl cast over her pretty evening dress.

When the little woman knelt down by Durward in the moonlight, very brave in her determination to control herself, she was his widow.

* * * * *

Thus did the fakir's curse come true, although there are people who tell us that such things are merely coincidence.

Gertrude M. Hayward.



GOLDEN STAR

A ROMANCE

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

SUMMARY OF THE PROLOGUE.

The prologue tells of the bridal of Vilcaroya and Golden Star, in the Sanctuary of the Sun in Cuzco, on the eve of the Spanish invasion and the fall of the Inca empire. It has been prophesied that when the sceptre of the Incas shall be grasped by the hand of one who has been dead, and is alive again, the ancient glories of their empire shall be restored. Golden Star, one of the sacred Virgins of the Sun, kneels at the foot of the altar and offers herself as the bride of him who will fulfil the prophecy. Vilcaroya swears for love of her to dare the ordeal. On the night of their bridal they are carried away to their secret resting place, and at the same time immense treasures are taken out of Cuzco and hidden against the time of their awakening.

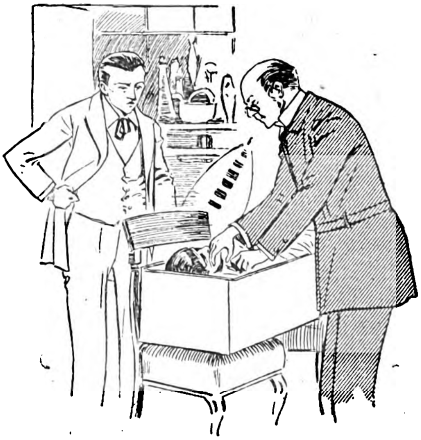
BOOK I.

FROM THE PAST TO THE PRESENT.

CHAPTER I.

His Highness the Mummy.

"Ah, what a thing it would be for us if his Inca Highness were really only asleep, as he looks to be. Just think what he could tell us—how easily he could re-create that lost wonderland of his for us, what riddles he could answer, what lies he could contradict. And then think of all the lost treasures that he could show us the way to. Upon my word, if Mephistopheles were to walk into this room just now I think I should be tempted to make a bargain with him. Do you know, Djama, I believe I would give half the remainder of my own life, whatever that may be, to learn the secrets that were once locked up in that withered, desiccated brain of his."



They were standing over a long packing-case.

The speaker was one of two men who were standing in a large room, half study half museum, in a big old-fashioned house in Maida Vale. Wherever the science of archæology was studied, Professor Martin Lamson was known as the highest living authority on the subject of the antiquities of South America. He had just returned from a year's relic hunting in Peru and Bolivia, and was enjoying the luxury of unpacking his treasures with the almost boyish delight that under such circumstances comes only to the true enthusiast. His companion was a somewhat slenderly built man, of medium height, whose clear, olive skin, straight black hair, and deep blue-black eyes betrayed a not very remote Eastern origin.

Dr. Laurens Djama was a physiologist, whose rapidly acquired fame—he was barely thirty-two—would have been considered sounder by his professional brethren if he had not been, as they thought, tarnished by excursions into bye-ways of science, which were believed to lead him perilously near to the borders of occultism. Five years before he had pulled the Professor through a very bad attack of the calentura in Panama, where they met by the merest traveller's chance, and since then they been fast friends.

They were standing over a long packing-case, some seven feet in length and two and a half in breadth, in which lay, at full length, wrapped in graveclothes that had once been gaily coloured, which were now faded and grey with the grave dust, the figure of a man with hands crossed over the breast, dead to all appearances, and yet so gruesomely lifelike, that it seemed hard to believe that the broad, muscular chest over which the crossed hands lay was not actually heaving and falling with the breath of life.

The face had been uncovered. It was that of a man still in the early prime of life. The dull brown hair was long and thick, the features somewhat aquiline, the cheek-bones rather prominent, the skin of a pale bronze, though darkened by the hues of death. Yet every detail of the face was so perfect and so life-like that, as the Professor had said, it seemed to be rather the face of a man in a deep sleep than that of an Inca prince, who must have been dead and buried for over three hundred years. The closed eyes, though somewhat sunken in their sockets, were the eyes of sleep rather than of death, and the lids seemed to lie so lightly over them that it looked as though one awakening touch would raise them.

"It is beyond all question the most perfect specimen of a mummy that I have seen," said the Doctor, stooping down and drawing his thin nervous fingers very lightly over the dried skin of the right cheek. "On my honour I really can't believe that His Highness, as you call him, ever really went to the other world by any of the orthodox routes. If you could imagine an absolute suspension of all the vital functions induced by the influence of something, some drug or hypnotic process unknown to modern science, brought into action on a human being in the very prime of his vital strength, then, so far as I can see, the results of that influence would be exactly what you see here."

"But surely that can't be anything but a dream. How would it be possible to bring all the vital functions to a dead stop like that, and yet keep them in such a state that it might be possible—for that's what I suppose you are driving at—to start them into activity again just as one might wind up a clock that had been stopped for a few weeks and set it going once more."

"My dear fellow, the borderland between life and death is so utterly unknown to the very best of us that there is no telling what frightful possibilities there may be lying hidden under the shadows that are over it. You know as well as I do that there are perfectly well-authenticated instances on record of Hindoo Fakirs who have allowed themselves to be placed in a state of suspended animation and had their tongues turned back into their throats, their mouths and noses covered with clay, and have then been buried in graves that have been filled up and had sentries watching day and night over them for as long a period as six weeks, and then have been dug up and restored to perfect health and strength again in a few hours. Now, if life can be suspended for six weeks and then restored to an organism which, from all physiological standpoints, must be regarded as inanimate, why not for six years or six hundred years, for the matter of that? Given once the possibility, which we may assume as proved, of a restoration to life after total suspension of animation, then it only becomes a question of preservation of tissue for more or less indefinite periods. Granted the tissue can so be preserved, then, given the other possibility already proved, and—well, we will talk about the other possibility afterwards. Now, tell me, don't you, as an archæologist, see anything peculiar about this Inca prince of yours?"

The Professor had been looking keenly at his friend during the delivery of this curious physiological lecture. He seemed as though he were trying to read the thoughts that were chasing each other through his brain behind the impenetrable mask of that smooth, broad forehead of his. He looked into his eyes, but saw nothing there save a cold, steady light that he had often seen before when the Doctor was discussing subjects that interested him deeply. As for his face, it was utterly impassive, the face of a dispassionate scientist quietly discussing the possible solution of a problem that had been laid before him. Whether his friend was really driving at some unheard of and unearthly solution of the problem which he himself had raised, or whether he was merely discussing the possible issue of some abstract question in physiology he was utterly unable to discover, and so he thought it best to confine himself to the matter in hand without hazarding any risky guesses that might possibly result in his own confusion. So he answered as quietly as he could:

"Yes, I must confess that there are two perhaps very important points of difference between this and any other Peruvian mummy that I have ever seen or heard of."

"Ah, I thought so," said Djama, half closing his eyes and allowing just the ghost of a smile to flit across his lips. "I thought I knew enough about archæology and the science of mummies in general to expect you to say that. Now, just for the gratification of my own vanity, I should like to try and anticipate what you are going to say, and if I'm wrong, well, of course, I shall only be too happy to be contradicted."

"Very well," laughed the Professor; "say on."

"Well, in the first place I believe I'm right in saying that all Peruvian mummies that have so far been discovered have been found in a sitting posture, with the legs drawn close up to the body by means of bindings and burial clothes so that the chin rested between the knees, while the arms were brought round the legs and folded over them. Then, again, these mummies have always been found in an upright position while you found this one lying down."

"Quite so, quite so," said the Professor. "In fact, I may say that no one save myself has ever discovered such a mummy as this among all the thousands that have been taken out of Peruvian burying-places. And, now, what is your other point?"

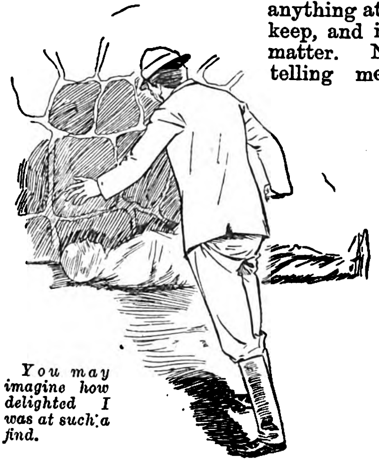
"Simply this," said Djama, kneeling down beside the case, and laying his hands over the abdomen of the recumbent figure. "In the case of all mummies, whether Egyptian or Peruvian, it was the invariable practice of the embalmers to take out the intestines and fill the abdominal cavity with preservative herbs and spices. Now, this has not been done in this case. Look here."

And deftly and swiftly he removed the dusty, half-decayed coverings from the body of the mummy while the Professor looked on half-wondering and half-frightened for the safety of his treasure.

"That has not been done here. You see the man's body is as perfect as it was on the day he died, to use a conventional term. Now, am I not right?"

"Yes, yes; perfectly right," answered the Professor, who felt himself fast losing his grip of the conversation which had taken so strange a turn. "But what has all this got to do with the most unique mummy that ever was brought from South America? Surely, in the name of all that's sacred, you don't mean——"

"My dear fellow, never mind what I mean for the present," replied Djama with another of his half smiles. "If I mean anything at all, the meaning will keep, and if I don't it doesn't matter. Now, do you mind telling me exactly how and where you came across this extraordinary specimen of, well, for want of a better term, we will say Inca embalming?"



You may imagine how delighted I was at such a find.

"Yes, willingly," said the Professor, glad to get back again on to the familiar ground of his own experiences. "I found it almost by accident in a little valley about four days' ride to the westward of Cuzco. I was on my way to Abancay across the Apurimac. My mule had fallen lame, and so I got belated. Night came on, and somehow we got off the track crossing one of the Punas—those elevated tablelands, you know, up among the mountains—and when the mule could go no farther we camped, and the next morning I found myself in an almost circular valley completely walled in by enormous mountains, save for the narrow, crooked gorge through which we had stumbled by the purest accident. The bottom of this gorge was filled by a little lake, and while I was exploring the shores of this I saw hidden underneath an overhanging ledge of rock a couple of courses of that wonderful mortarless masonry which the Incas alone seemed to know how to build. I had no sooner seen it than all desire of getting to Abancay or anywhere else had left me. I made my arriero turn the animals loose for the day, and then I sent him back to a village we had passed through the day before to buy more provisions and bring them to me.

"As soon as he had got out of sight I set to work to get some of the stones out and see what there was behind them. I knew there must be something, for the Incas never wasted labour. It was hard work, for the stones were fitted together as perfectly as the pieces of a Chinese puzzle; but at last I got one out and then the rest was easy. Behind the stones I found a little chamber hollowed out of the rock, perfectly clean and dry, and on the floor of this I found, without any other covering than what you see there, the mummy of his Highness lying on what had once been a bed of soft Vicuña skins, as perfect and as lifelike as though he had only crept in there twelve hours before and had laid down for a good night's rest.

"You may imagine how delighted I was at such a find. I hardly knew how to contain myself until my man came back. I put the stones back into their places as well as I could, and when José returned the next day I had the animals saddled up, and started off instantly back to Cuzco. There I had this case made, bought two extra mules, came back to the valley, packed up my mummy, took it back to Cuzco, and from there to the railway terminus at Sicuani and took it down by train to Arequipa, where I left it in safe keeping until I had finished the rest of my exploration. Then I went back, took it down to Mollendo, got it on board the steamer, and here it is."

"And you didn't find any traces of other treasure-places, I suppose, in the valley," said Djama, who had listened with the most perfect attention to the Professor's story.

"No, I didn't, though I must confess that one side of the cave in which I found this was walled up with the same kind of masonry as there was in front of it; but, to tell you the truth, the Peruvian Government has such insane ideas about treasure-hunting, and the life of a man who is believed to have discovered anything worth having is worth so little in the wilder districts of the interior, that I was afraid of losing the treasure that I had got, perhaps for the sake of a few gold ornaments that might have been dug out of the hill, that I decided to be content with what I'd found."

"H'm," said the Doctor. "Well, you may have been wise under the circumstances; I dare say you were. But we can see about that afterwards. Meanwhile there is something else to be talked about."

He stopped suddenly, took a quick turn or two up and down the room, with his hands clasped behind him and his eyes fixed on the floor. Then he went to the door, opened it, looked out, shut it and locked it, and then came back again and sat down without a word in his chair, staring steadily at the impassive face of the mummy in the packing-case.

CHAPTER II.

A PHYSIOLOGICAL EXPERIMENT.

"WHY, what's the matter, Doctor?" said the Professor, a trifle sharply. "You don't suppose I am afraid of anyone coming to steal my treasure, do you?"

"My dear fellow," said Djama, looking him straight in the eyes, and speaking very slowly, as though his mind was doing something else besides shaping the thoughts to which he was giving utterance, "I don't for a moment suppose that there are thieves about, or that if there were any burglar with a competent knowledge of his profession would think of stealing your mummy, priceless as it may prove to be. I locked the door because I don't want to be interrupted. I want to talk to you about a very important matter."

"And that is?"

"Mephistopheles."

"What?"

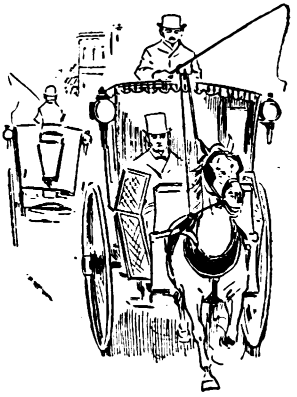
"Gently, my friend, gently, don't get excited yet. You will want all your nerves soon, I can assure you. Yes, I am quite serious. You know that in the good old days when people still believed in His Majesty of Darkness, such a speech as the one you remember making a short time ago was quite enough to call up one of his agents armed with full powers to make contracts and do all necessary business."

"Look here, Laurens, if you go on talking like that, I shall begin to think you have gone out of your mind."

"My dear fellow, to be quite candid with you, I don't care two pins what you think on that subject. I have been called mad too many times for that. Now, suppose, just for argument's sake, that I were Mephistopheles, and staked my diabolic reputation on the statement that in that thing you possess a possible key to those lost treasures of the Incas which ten generations of men have hunted for in vain, what kind of a bargain would you be inclined to make with me on the strength of it? Half the rest of your life, I think you said, and as that wouldn't be very much good to me, suppose we say the half of any treasures we may discover by the help of our silent friend there? Eh—will that suit you?"

"Are you really serious, Djama, or are you only dreaming another of these wild scientific dreams of yours?" exclaimed the Professor, taking a couple of quick strides towards him. "What connection can there possibly be between a mummy, some three hundred years old, and the lost treasures of the Incas?"

"This man was an Inca, wasn't he?" said the Doctor, abruptly, "and one of high rank, too, from what you have said. He lived just about the time of the Conquest, didn't he—the time when the priests stripped their temples, and the nobles emptied their palaces of their treasures to save them from the Spaniards. Is it not likely that he would know where, at any rate, a great part of them was buried? Nay, may he not even have known the localities of the lost mines that the Incas got their hundredweights of gold from, and of the emerald mines which no one has ever been able to find? Why, Lamson, if these dead lips could speak, I believe they could make you and me millionaires in an hour; and why shouldn't they speak?"



In a hansom and on his way to Kilburn.

"Don't talk like that, Djama, for Heaven's sake. It is too serious a thing to joke about," said the Professor, with a half-frightened glance in his set and shining eyes. "I should have thought you, of all men, knew enough of the facts of life and death not to talk such nonsense as that."

"Nonsense!" said the physiologist, interrupting him almost angrily; "may I not know enough of the facts of life and death, as you call them, to know that that is not nonsense? But there, it's no use arguing about things like this. Will you allow this mummy of yours to be made the subject of, well, we will say, an experiment in physiology?"

"What, the finest and most unique huaca that was ever brought to Europe——"

"It would only be made finer still by the experiment, even if it failed. I know what you are going to say, and I will give you my word of honour, and, if you like, I'll pledge you my professional reputation, that not a hair of its head shall be injured. Let me take it to my laboratory, and I promise you solemnly that in a week you shall have it back, not as it is now, but either the body of your Inca, as perfect as it was the day he died, or——"

He stopped, and looked hard at his friend, as if wondering what the effects of his next words would be upon him.

"Or what?" asked the Professor, almost in a whisper.

"Your Inca prince, roused from his three-hundred-year sleep, and able to answer your questions and guide us to his lost mines and treasure houses."

"Are you in earnest, Djama?" the Professor whispered, catching him by the arm and looking round at the mummy as though he half thought that the silent witness in the packing-case might be listening to the words which, if it could have heard, would have had such a terrible significance for it. "Do you really mean to say in sober earnest that there is the remotest chance of your science being able to work such a miracle as that?"

"A chance, yes," replied Djama steadily. "It is not a certainty, of course, but I believe it to be possible. Will you let me try?"

"Yes, you shall try," answered the Professor in a voice nothing like as steady as his. "If any other man but you had even hinted at such a thing, I would have seen him—well, in a lunatic asylum first. But there, I will trust my Inca to you. It seems a fearful thing even to attempt, and yet, after all, if it fails there will be no harm done, and if it succeeds—ah, yes, if it succeeds—it will mean——"

"Endless fame for you, my friend, as the re-creator of a lost society, and for both of us wealth, perhaps beyond counting. But stop a moment, granted success, how shall we talk with our Inca revenant? Have I not heard you say that the Aymaru dialect of the Quichua tongue is lost as completely as the Inca treasures?"

"Not quite, though I believe I am now the only white man on earth who understands it."

"Good! then let me get to work at once, and in a week—well, in a week we shall see."

The physiologist dined with the Professor that night, and the small hours were growing large before they ended the long talk which their strange bargain and the still stranger experiment which was to result from it formed the subject. The next day the packing-case containing the mummy was transferred to Djama's laboratory, and then for a whole week neither the Professor nor any other of his friends or acquaintances had either sight or speech of him.

Every caller at his house in Brondesbury Park was politely but firmly denied admittance on professional grounds, and three letters and two telegrams which the Professor had sent to him, after being himself denied admittance, remained unanswered.

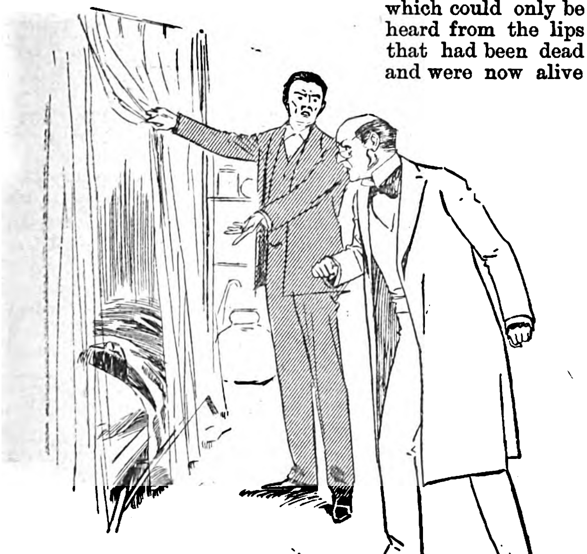
At last, on the Thursday following the Friday on which the mummy had been sent to the laboratory, the Professor received a telegram telling him to come at once to the doctor. Three minutes after he had read it he was in a hansom and on his way to Kilburn, wondering what it was that he was to be brought face to face with during the next half hour.

This time there was no denial. The door opened as he went up the steps, and the servant handed him a note. He tore it open and read:

"Come round to the laboratory and make a new acquaintance who will yet be an old one."

His heart stood still, and he caught his breath sharply as he read the words which told him that the unearthly experiment for which he had furnished the subject had been successful.

The Doctor's laboratory stood apart from the house in the long, narrow garden at the back, and as he approached the door he stopped for a moment, and an almost irresistible impulse to go away and have nothing more to do with the unholy work in hand took possession of him. Then the love of his science and the longing to hear the marvels which could only be heard from the lips that had been dead and were now alive again overcame his fears, and he went up to the door and knocked softly.

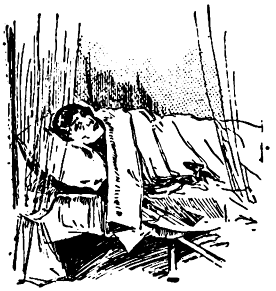


Djama pulled aside a curtain

It was opened by a haggard, wild-eyed man, whom he scarcely recognised as his old friend. Djama did not speak, he simply caught hold of the sleeve of his coat with a nervous, trembling grasp, drew him in, shut the door, and led him to a corner of the room where there was a little camp bed, curtained all round with thin, transparent muslin, through which he could see the shape of a man lying under the sheets.

Djama pulled the curtain aside and said in a hoarse whisper: "Look, it has been hard work, and terrible work, too, but I have succeeded. Do you see, he is breathing."

The Professor stared, wide-eyed at the white pillow on which lay the head of what, a week before, had been his mummy. Now it was the head of a living man; the pale bronze of the skin was clear and moist with the dew of life; the lips were no longer brown and dry, but faintly red and slightly parted, and the counterpane, which was pulled close up under the chin, was slowly rising and falling with the regular rhythm of a sleeper's breathing. He looked from the face of him who had been dead and was alive again to the face of the man whose daring science and perfect skill had wrought the unholy miracle, and then he shrank back from the bedside, pulling Djama with him, and whispering:



"Good God, it is even more awful than it is wonderful! How did you do it?"

"That is my secret," whispered Djama, his dry lips shaping themselves into a ghastly smile, "and for all the treasures that that man ever saw, I wouldn't tell it to a living soul, or do such hideous work again. I tell you I have seen life and death fighting together for two days and nights in this room—not, mind you, as they fight on a death-bed, but the other way, and I would rather see a thousand men die than one more come back out of death into life. You see, he is sleeping now. He opened his eyes just before day-break this morning, that's nearly ten hours ago, but if I lived ten thousand years I should never forget that one look he gave me before he shut them again. Since then he has slept, and I stood by that bed testing his pulse and his breathing for eight hours before I wired you. Then I knew he would live, and so I sent for you."

The Professor looked at his friend with an involuntary and unconquerable aversion rising in his heart against him; an aversion that was half fear, half horror, and then he remembered that he himself had a share in the fearful work which had been done, a work that could not now be undone without murder.

With another backward look at the bed, he said, in a whisper that was almost a smothered groan:

"When will he wake?"

Before Djama could reply, the question was answered by a faint rustle, and a low, long-drawn sigh from the bed. They looked and saw the Inca's face turned towards them, and two fever-bright eyes shining through the curtains.

"He is awake already, two hours sooner than I expected," said Djama, in a voice that he strove vainly to keep steady. "Come, now, you are the only man on earth who can talk to him. Let us see if he has come back to reason as well as to life."

"Yes, I will try," said the Professor faintly. He took a couple of trembling steps. Then the lights in the room began to dance, the whitewashed walls reeled round him, and he pitched forward and fell unconscious by the side of the bed.

(To be continued.)

Lost, a Bag of Gold.

"ARE you engaged, coachman?"

I had stopped at that moment to water my horse, and to quench my own thirst in a tavern near. I had scarcely reached my horse's head, when I heard the above question, and saw, as I turned round, a young lady standing by the side of my cab. Without delay I answered, and, opening the door, I helped the lady in.

Her face had a certain hesitating, timid expression, which made me judge that my fare was not an independent lady, but a housekeeper or a governess. She wore a black silk dress and a woollen shawl. Her hands and feet were small, but it did not escape me that her gloves were very much worn.

I asked her where she wished to be taken. She named a locality not of the best, and with a trembling voice, as if ashamed of it. I climbed on the box, and whipped up. Although it was nothing to me where my fare wished to go, I felt a sort of curiosity as to who and what the lady might be. I had observed that she seemed to have a pretty face, although the veil that she wore over it did not let me see her features plainly. During the trip I was driven by my curiosity to peep through the cab window behind me, and saw that she had put up her veil. She looked frightfully pale and thin. Her skin was like wax, and one did not need to be a doctor to know that she was consumptive.

She held in her hands something on which her eyes were fixed, and there came over her face an expression of thankfulness and satisfaction. What the object was I could not tell exactly. I only saw that it was light-coloured, and had no decided shape. I had only two seconds for my observation. I had to see to my horse in the crowded street.

I gave him a lash with the whip, and at a quick trot we soon arrived at the part of the city indicated. As soon as I found the number which the lady had given me, I stopped, got off the box, and opened the door to help her out. She appeared to be in great agitation, as if an unpleasant interview was before her. I received from her over the price of her fare, which she evidently knew, an extra tip, thanked her, and she hurried away, while I turned my carriage towards a neighbouring public-house to invest immediately in a glass of beer.

But before I went in I proceeded to straighten the cab cushions, and see that all was right inside. As soon as I opened the door again I saw some object lying on the seat. It was a small linen bag—without doubt what the lady had held in her lap. I took it in my hand, and its weight astonished me. With not a little curiosity I looked at it again and again, and at last tried to open it. It was easily done, for the bag was fastened only by a little piece of string.

One can imagine my surprise when I found that it was filled with gold pieces! I dared not look at them further in this place, as a policeman might possibly notice, and ask how I came by the gold. Meanwhile, I tied the bag up again, and put it in the wide pocket of my coat. Instead of indulging myself in the glass of beer, I drove to the nearest cab-stand, and took my place in the rear of the line of cabs, so that I could be sure of not being wanted for the next half hour.

I got into my cab, as cabmen often do when they want a little rest, and I examined for the second time my new-found treasure. I shook the contents of the bag on the seat, and sat with dazed eyes before quite a pile of gold.

After delighting my eyes with it for a while, I counted the money, partly half, partly whole sovereigns, singly, again into the bag, and found that it amounted to exactly the sum of £150.

I could not think otherwise than that this money belonged to the pale young lady whom I had last carried. How she came by it, and what she was going to do with it, was another thing. I had found it, and it was a great temptation to me to keep it. What could I not undertake with such capital? I could buy myself a cab and horses, and instead of being a miserable hired cabman, would myself own cabs, or establish a livery-stable, which would make me independent.

The picture of the future, which I painted in this way, was alluring enough, but along with it was the consideration that I should be a thief if I retained the money. My selfishness had a severe struggle with my conscience.

While I now looked more closely at the bag, I found, written in ink upon it, the address, "Miss Mildred Berkeley, No. 4, Bentley Place." This address, which had hitherto escaped me, I read with as much disgust as astonishment; for there now remained to me, as an honourable man, but one way. I meditated over it a time, but could come to no conclusion. "With honesty," said one voice in my soul, "you will earn no bread; with honesty you can go, in your old age, to the poor-house."

At last selfish interest and conscience came to a compromise, and I resolved to keep the money till the following day. Then, I thought, there will be a reward offered, and no one can blame me for at least profiting by that.

I remained all day in a fever of excitement; and, when night came, I felt really ill. I could not sleep. Next morning I was pale and wretched. I went to breakfast where cabmen are in the habit of drinking their coffee, and eagerly looked for the morning paper. Sure enough, at the top of the column for lost and found articles, I found this advertisement:

LOST. Yesterday, in a cab, a bag of gold. The finder is earnestly entreated to bring the money to No. 7, Grattan Street, three flights up, where he will receive a liberal reward.

I knew well what this last passage signified, for I had already in many cases learned that this common expression allowed great latitude. A liberal reward meant perhaps from one to five shillings and a glass of beer. That would be fine amends for resigning £150.

I went about all day with the bag in my pocket like a madman, which made me once or twice nearly run over people. My night's rest was disturbed by phantoms, and the morning brought me no relief. I felt miserable, and, what was worse, even in my waking hours the phantoms did not fade from my eyes.

To my great surprise the advertisement was not repeated. I could not explain it to myself, but began to fear that the police were on my track, and that some fine day I must walk into prison.

A week passed, and I had become a mere shadow of the strong, healthy man I had previously been. I could reproach myself only with not having returned the bag to its owner. I had not taken a penny of its contents.

Strangely enough, I had during this time unusual good luck. My cab was always occupied, and I earned a good deal of money. When I reflected on this fact, I believed that Providence thereby gave me a plain hint. The result was that on the tenth day I came to the resolution to return the lost property. The money had become a burden to me ever since I stretched my hand out towards it. I had had no rest by night or day; I felt weak and wretched.

I had noted the address given in the advertisement, and so I drove at noon on the tenth day to 7, Grattan Street. It was the place where I had driven the young lady. The door stood wide open. I called a boy to hold my horse, and went up the stairs. I asked a girl I met for Miss Berkeley, and she thought that such a person lived on the attic floor. I went up higher, and knocked at the door I presumed to be the right one. I could not help feeling that I had been a rascal, and only the consciousness that I was at last going to do right gave any ease to my conscience.

At my knock a weak voice called, "Come in!" I opened the door and entered.

For a moment the darkness prevented my seeing the interior. The windows were dim with dust, smoke, and dirt, and some broken panes were pasted over with paper. A table and two chairs, with a miserable bed, made the whole furniture.

"Step softly; Death is here," said a trembling voice, in which I only too well recognised the young lady whom I had brought there ten days before. But how she had changed in this short time! Her cheeks were hollow, her face was pale as death, and her eyes had an unusual brightness.

When I had gained the necessary self-command, I said, with my face turned away, for it was impossible for me to look on myself as other than a cowardly villain:

"I bring the bag of gold which——" and then I muttered something about having only just seen the notice.

"It is too late!" she whispered sadly, "he for whom that money was destined is no longer living. Here he lies. He died some hours ago. Yesterday you could have saved him—saved us both—but now it is too late, too late!"

And she went on murmuring to herself, "too late, too late," as if she had fallen into a stupor.

Suddenly the poor woman rose slowly from the chair where she sat by the death-bed, and, after walking up and staring at me, gave a hollow cry, which thrilled me to the marrow of my bones.

"It is only right that you should know what you have to answer for," she said, "that is your work; you can be proud of it, it has been a complete success."

She laughed wildly—it was more a mingling of laughing and crying—and looked at me.

"He was my husband," she went on, after a while; "we lived apart; why and wherefore is nothing to you. For five years I heard nothing of him. During this time I lived out as a governess, and earned that money which you hold in your hand. May God forgive you for what you have done!"

"At last he found me," she continued weakly, "and wrote, begging me to return to him. I came. He lived in this hole in sickness and poverty. Had I not lost my gold then I would have taken him away and cared well for him. He died of hunger. We have had no food for the last three days, and there is no other fate for me but to follow him. Oh, you have done a manly deed! Look there—your work!"

She drew a cloth from the face of the corpse; it looked almost a skeleton, and the sorrow of the sight overpowered her. She threw herself over it, and sobbed violently.

The emotion brought on a terrible fit of coughing. Her disease had gone too far for her to survive the shock of her husband's death, and if she could not die in his arms, she died by his side.

Terrified, I spread the sheet over the two dead forms, and hurried to call the landlady. I still held the gold in my hand. It seemed to burn like fire, and I would have hurled it from me if I had not a duty to fulfil. The landlady was very indifferent about the fate of the unfortunate pair. She merely said that nothing different had been expected, but was much pleased when I asked what they owed, and proceeded to pay her.

I went to an undertaker, and arranged with him for a fitting funeral for the couple united in death. I could not and would not seek for their friends and relatives to draw suspicion upon myself. It was now clear to me why the advertisement for the loss of the money appeared but once. The poor souls had not the means to pay for a repetition.

I followed the coffins to the grave. No stone marks it; but I know it well, and it often follows me in my dreams.

The very next day I drove to the Hospital for Consumptives, and put the rest of the bag of gold in the collection box, for I would rather have died of hunger than have kept a penny of it. W. H. H.

AFTER MANY MONTHS

WHEN I first met Owen Johnson he had not long come to London, and the iron of disappointment had not entered into his soul. For some time he had contributed short stories to the weekly journal in the little Devonshire town where he had been brought up. They had not been paid for, I gathered from him, and his friends, imbued with the idea that he had in him the making of a journalist, had counselled him to try his luck in London.

He had some small means of his own, which was a good thing, as although the editor of the local organ had been good enough to give him a letter of introduction to the editor of a somewhat obscure London weekly, it had not resulted in his obtaining more than very occasional employment; not enough, indeed, to keep him, and he was always on the look out for other openings for his literary productions.

To give him his due, he was an indefatigable worker, and writing came naturally to him; but somehow he lacked the all-important knowledge of how to suit the critical taste of the average London editor, the result being that almost every post brought him back a more or less bulky MS. with the usual formula, "declined with thanks."

Shortly after our first acquaintance he wanted to change his apartments, and there happening to be a "combined" bed and sitting-room to let in the house in which I was then living, I suggested that it might suit him to take it, and that we could live together, an idea that he cordially assented to, and from mere friends we quickly became intimate associates.

Before long I learnt from him all there was to tell about himself and his belongings. Left an orphan at an early age, he and his sister had been brought up by an uncle in the West of England, and when the time came for him to go out into the world and seek his own living, a berth had been found for him in a large warehouse. But the work was always distasteful to him, his desire being to embark upon the precarious undertaking of journalism, and that he had succeeded in a modest way I have already stated. Whether he would ever make sufficient by his pen to support himself and his sister, who, he informed me, was a confirmed invalid, seemed doubtful, and I often did my best to persuade him to relinquish the idea and go back to commercial life.

On one occasion, indeed, the opportunity having unexpectedly offered itself, I was in a position to obtain him a berth in a city firm, at a salary which was considerably higher than his average earnings had been during the few months we had known each other. I suggested that by accepting it he might still in his spare time devote himself to literary work, and then, if the latter increased sufficiently to justify such a step, he might discard the former.

He was very grateful to me for the offer, and I half hoped would see his way to entering the situation, but, after a night's reflection, he said he had become convinced he could never again submit to the drudgery of office work, and that having once relinquished it he would not again attempt it, but stick to his pen in another direction.

As if to justify his determination, that very morning's post brought him a proof—a most unusual occurrence—of a sketch he had written for one of the numerous "family" journals now circulating in London and elsewhere.

His face beamed with excitement as he saw what it was, and he felt sure, he said, it was only the prelude of further successes in the same direction—a wish that was unfortunately not to be fulfilled.

Weeks went on, and, with the exception of one or two minor contributions being accepted by a friendly editor, who had taken a liking to the lad, and given him any little thing to write whenever he could, his literary aspirations remained unfulfilled.

Being myself employed in the City all day, we saw nothing of each other until the evening, but our landlady—a good soul, albeit somewhat loquacious—gave me to understand that my friend had spent almost the entire days in writing, hardly stopping to take his meals. He did not tell me so himself—in fact, he had become more than usually reserved just about this period—and I, knowing his disposition, did not attempt to draw his secret from him. My idea was that he was probably writing a longer story than usual—a shilling shocker, possibly—and that when it was finished he would tell me all about it.

As it happened, my surmise was partially, but not entirely, correct. At the end of a month, one evening on my return from business, it was evident he had something important to convey to me.

"Any good news to-day?"

"Yes, I've done it—done it at last. I meant to tell you two or three times, but I put it off, and put it off, and now it is done at last, and here it is," at the same time showing me a bulky roll of foolscap.

"One, two, or three volumes?" I asked laughingly.

"Guess again."

"A storyette?"

"No; a play. Ah! I thought you would be surprised. The fact is," he continued hurriedly, "I feel I am capable of attempting better work than I have been doing, and it has always been my ambition to write a play; something real, that will appeal to the sympathies of an audience, and not merely a story to be read in ten minutes, cast aside, and forgotten."

"And where have you gone to for your plot and incidents, may I ask?"

"Where? Here—here in London. The few short months I have been up here I have heard and seen things I little dreamt of before, and I have done my best to weave some of them into a play such as will, I hope, commend itself to the notice of some theatrical manager."

"I don't want to dishearten you, but I have always heard it is extremely difficult to get a manager to look at a play by an unknown writer. There is a glut of plays in the market, they always say."

"Ah, but there is a human interest in my work, which I feel must make itself felt. It is not imagination; it is reality, what I have seen and heard, and it is a picture of life as it is, as it actually exists here in London, not as it is supposed to."

"Have you any idea as to where to place it?"

"That's just it," delightedly. "I have not written it altogether on spec, as it were. The Editor of the *Weekly Buzzer* told me a month ago he knew one or two managers who were looking out for a play dealing with incidents of London life, not down east—that has been done to death, he says—nor the fashionable West-end; but a something between the two, an admixture of the dull respectability of the suburbs, the thievish rascality of the city, and the foibles of the aristocracy."

"You have allowed yourself plenty of scope, at all events."

"That's the beauty of it. My play will not appeal to any individual section; it will be of general interest, and I have a presentiment of its success, somehow."

"What do you say, now, if I light a pipe, and you read it over to me."

"No, Charley, anything but that; my ambition is for it to come upon you as a surprise. I want you to be in front the night it comes out. Ah! I see you smile. But it will come out, it must, it shall," he added vehemently, with a strange look in his eyes, that made me regard him with a feeling of dismay. The idea entered my head that he had overworked himself, and that his mind was beginning to give way.

Evidently he divined what was passing through my mind, for in an altogether different tone of voice, he went on:

"It may seem very ungenerous of me, but I can't help it. When I first began to write, my idea was to read over each act—it's in three acts—as I finished it, but as I went on I made up my mind I would wait till it was finally completed, and give you a surprise; and then I changed my mind again, and thought it would be best to keep it until the night. I haven't said a word to Lily about it even, and I want her to see it first in the papers. I hope the critics won't be too severe on me, that's all."

Seeing the confident frame of mind he was in, it seemed a shame to attempt to disillusionise him, and I began to talk about his sister, a never failing source of conversation between us.

"It is not for myself I care so much, you know; it's for her I want this play to be a success. She writes me as cheerful as usual, but my aunt says her cough continues troublesome, and the doctor says the South of France would be the best place for her. Do you know, I have a kind of a feeling that if my play is accepted—and it must be," he added, in the vehement tone he had used before—"it will be mainly due to her. It may be a strange thing to say, but if it had not been for her I could never have written it. The desire to take her away to a warmer clime seemed to inspire my thoughts in some way, and if it wasn't for her I should not be so sanguine about its acceptance as I am. My friend the editor advised me to try Mr. A—— first. 'He has a partiality,' he says, 'for plays dealing with present day life and incidents.' Would you try and see him or send it by post?" he inquired, anxiously.

"Perhaps the latter would be the best plan; you see he is a very busy man."

"I quite agree with you; I'll post it to-night."

In less than a week it came back with the usual stereotyped reply, "declined with thanks."

To my surprise, Johnson was not a bit disheartened. "He doesn't know what he is throwing away," was his remark, with a smile.

Poor boy, I felt he had not exactly hit the right nail on the head; but in view of his fatuous enthusiasm, I had not the heart to tell him so in so many words.

Once again it was sent forth, only to meet the same reception; and so it went on, but he never lost heart, only after a time he altered his tactics and used to wait on managers and attempt to induce them to see him. In most cases he was unsuccessful, although now and again he found one more complacent than the rest. But in every instance the result was the same, his play was not accepted. It was, they admitted, not without merit; but it was crude, over-burdened with action and incident, and in fact would not do at all.

Continual disappointments at last began to tell upon him. He did not actually become despondent, but he confided to me that perhaps he had been too ambitious; it would have been better had he commenced in a smaller way—a one-act play, a curtain raiser, what did I think of it? Several managers had told him there was power in his work. Would I advise him to try again?

I replied that a short play might reasonably be expected to stand a better chance of acceptance than a more ambitious effort. More I did not feel justified in saying.

"I think you are right. I'll have another try; and, do you know, it would be more convenient to me to be nearer the theatres. One never knows what may turn up; and although I shall be very sorry to leave here, where I have been so comfortable, still, I must go, and shall give a week's notice to-day. I shall look you up sometimes, you know, and tell you how I am getting on."

"Poor boy," I said to myself, "so it has come to that, has it?" feeling that a cheaper lodging was his real motive for moving more than anything else. I would gladly have offered him pecuniary help, but I knew him well enough to be sure it would not be accepted.

A week later he left, promising to send me his new address. He did not do so, however, and it was nearly ten days before I saw him. I was struck with his altered appearance. He was pale, and looked ill.

"You have been overworking yourself, I'm afraid."

"Oh, I don't know. I have been sticking to it pretty close. I have taken your advice and written a short play—one-act this time—and Mr. B—— promised to let me know to-morrow if it will do."

"I hope his answer will be favourable."

"Well, I'm not so sanguine as I used to be, but I gave him an outline of the plot, and he said he thought it might do. I'm to know to-morrow, and if it does I will meet you coming away from the office."

The next day I saw him coming towards me, his face radiant with delight.

"It's all right, and it is to come out as soon as possible."

"Well, let me be the first to congratulate you; and now come along and let's have dinner together."

Was it my fancy? or did he devour his food with the avidity of a man to whom regular meals had not been the rule of late?

By the time the meal was over he had become communicative. "Do you know, if it hadn't come off soon, I should have had to look for something to do, my finances have run down almost to vanishing point"—with an attempt at a laugh.

"You won't mind what I am going to say, will you?"

"Not a bit."

"Well, if two or three pounds would be any good just till you are paid, you know. You will be having some extra expenses I dare say."

"You are very good, and I could repay you in a week or two. My little play goes into rehearsal at once, and it will come out in about a fortnight's time, but I have managed somehow so far, and I won't forestall my inheritance now, many thanks all the same. I shall be busy attending rehearsals until then, so don't expect to see me again till it is all over. But you will come and see it, won't you?"

"See it! of course I will; and see you bow your acknowledgments to the audience, I hope."

A week later I got a post card bearing an address in Westminster, briefly announcing that his play would be produced on the following Wednesday.

Needless to say I booked a seat, and was in my place in good time.

The little play was an undoubted success; there was a freshness and originality about the plot that charmed the audience, and at the fall of the curtain on an extremely effective and well-arranged "curtain," their were loud cries for "Author, Author!" The heavy curtain was moved aside, and I looked forward to seeing my friend appear and receive, at last, his well-earned reward. In his place, however, came the manager, who announced briefly that the author was not in the house, but that the friendly reception accorded to his play should be duly conveyed to him.

A strange feeling of presentiment of something being wrong with my friend came over me. Hurrying out of the theatre I jumped into a cab, telling the man to drive me to his lodgings in Westminster. My acquaintance with the locality was nil, but after driving through a network of streets, my jehu stopped at No. 123, which, to my surprise, proved to be a tenement lodging-house of the lowest class. A slatternly woman stood in the doorway, and eyed me with suspicion.

"Is Mr. Johnson in?"

"Ain't no such name here."

"But there must be," I replied, producing his post card, and proceeding to describe his appearance.

"Oh, 'im, is it? You'll find him hup stairs in the top attic, unless he's gone hout. My gal took a tellygral to him just now. Didn't you, Liz?"

"Yus," said a smaller edition of the slatternly individual.

"May I go up and see him, please?"

"Certainly; and as he've got such fine friends, maybe I'll see the colour of my money some day."

Not noticing the remark, I proceeded hurriedly upstairs. "The top attic I think you said," I shouted back.

"Yus; number twenty-one on the door."

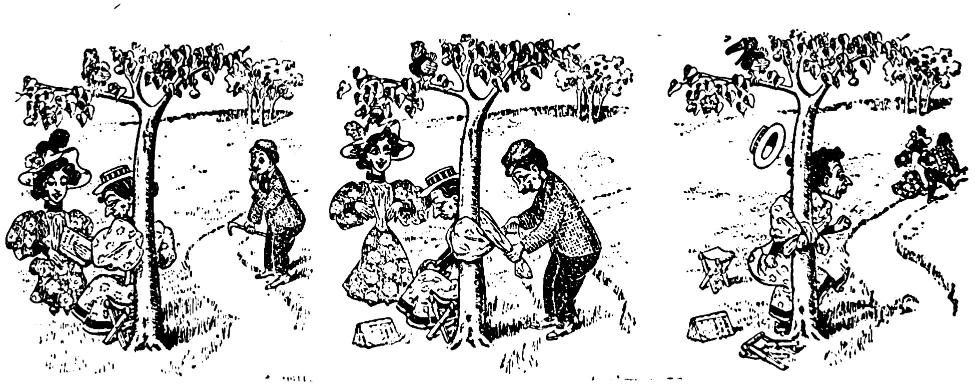
Hastily I opened the door. "Why, man, it's a gigantic succ——." The word was not finished. Seated on a broken chair, at an old rickety table, was my friend, with an open telegram in his clenched hand—dead!

Mechanically I read the telegram: "Your sister much worse. Come at once."

To summon the landlady was the work of an instant, and from her I learnt the truth. My poor friend must have been sadly pinched for means. He owed two weeks rent, and I gathered that for days he had been practically without food. The terrible message he had in his hand completed the work lack of proper nourishment had effectually commenced.

In the evening papers next day were two items of intelligence that to me possessed a sad significance. The one was a most favourable review of a new one-act play by an unknown author, and the other an account of an inquest held that afternoon on the body of Owen Johnson, the verdict of the jury being "Death from failure of the heart's action, accelerated by want of proper food." And this after many months!

PETER PARR.



FROM MURPHY'S DOWN TO ANGEL'S

We had ridden three hours with a stupid stage-driver, and I was chagrined and disappointed. I had engaged the front seat two weeks in advance, and, being a Britisher, had expected to have a chance to study one of the old-time stage-drivers on his native heath; but, though it was said he had been on the route twenty years, he simply chewed a quid of tobacco and could not be induced to talk. An occasional grunt of assent or dissent was the most he vouchsafed us, and it was with a feeling of relief we changed stages at Murphy's and had another driver.

The drive from Murphy's to Angel's is over fifteen miles of dusty, uninteresting road, and we had not looked forward to the prospect with pleasure; but our new driver had an air of business and a looseness of tongue that were very refreshing after the mummified silence of the other man, and promised well for our entertainment. The native Americans seemed to see this as well as I.

Then, too, we saw that we had made a mistake about our first driver. The second man was, of course, the old stager, with his many thrilling adventures and hair-breadth escapes, while the first man was evidently a novice in the business. We took our seats and prepared ourselves for a most interesting time.

"Hope you're all comfortable, ladies?" began our second man, in a manner very different from the other gruff bore. "I do like mighty well to have ladies in the front seat with me; but I'm quite a fav'rite with the ladies, it seems—they always want the front seat."

"Oh, I see, you are the old stage-driver!" I exclaimed, "and you will tell us some of your interesting stories. How lovely. What is your name?"

"My real name—no matter; but they all call me Tennessee up here. You see, I come from Tennessee, an' I've got the southern twang, an' when I first come I talked a heap 'bout my native state, an' bragged some, too, I guess, coming from the south, you know, an' the boys like to twit a fellow; but I've travelled round so much that I've lost most of my twang—knocked 'bout considerable in my day. Fellow can't help rubbing on some polish, you know—I expect that's why I'm such a fav'rite with the ladies. It's real funny how all the old maids get stuck on me, an' the widders, too," Tennessee chuckled. "By jimminy cricketts! Ex—cuse *me*, if I get off a swear-word now an' then—I don't know which is the worst, old maids or widders." (I took a sly glance at my companion, who was a young and pretty widow who lived in San Francisco.) "I'm writing a book on my experience with the women."

"Why," said the little widow, "I should think you would get married, with so many to choose from."

"Well, it does seem that way. You see, I did try it onst. I'm a widderer—got sons over twenty years old—wouldn't believe it, now, would you? Most people take me to be 'bout thirty. I'm by rights over forty; but, great Jupiter, whipstitch—ex—cuse *me*, we old stagers can't help a little profanity—I wouldn't have any trouble marrying. I most always propose to the women before I get them through!" (My pretty companion began to look alarmed.) "The women like it—particular the widows. Now, we're coming to a little down grade. Got on a pretty heavy load, so guess we'll take it easy. Go 'long there, Suse—Nick, you old rack-a-bones!"

We rounded the brow of the hill, and the horses began the steep descent with a gentle trot; but within a few seconds their speed had accelerated to a hard gallop. The old Concord coach rolled from side to side, and we seemed in danger of upsetting, but our time had not yet come, and we reached the level road in safety. The widow and I were gazing at Tennessee with admiration. How fearless he was! What splendid driving! But a timid man on the back seat was first to recover his speech.

"I think you had better use your brake, driver," he said, in a querulous voice; "that driving was altogether too fast for a heavy coach."

"Listen to that old duffer," said Tennessee, *sotto voce*. "Guess he's never seen a hill before." Then he raised his voice. "Well, I will try," he said calmly, glancing back. "Why, the brake's gone!" he exclaimed.

We all looked at the rear wheels in dismay. The brake was gone in truth.

"Well, we'll have to go back—that's plain," said the timid man.

"What! pull up that hill?" said Tennessee, with disgust; "not if I know myself, and I think I do. We'll just plough through, old man. I never had an accident in my life. Why, last week I had twelve people on board—two women an' a kid here in front, an' one of the front wheels rolled off right on this down grade, an' rolled a hundred yards down the road, an' we just settled down kind of comfortable like, an' I never spilled a person or broke a screw. Oh, I'll get you through safe, you can rest on that."

We were trotting along at a lively rate, and I glanced nervously at the heavy axles. I hoped devoutly that the wheels were secure.

Tennessee continued his talk with the most nonchalant air, as if brakes and wheels and things of that kind were of minor consideration.

"This house we are coming to is the only post-office between Murphy's and Angel's," he said. "Nice little woman keeps it—mighty sweet on me—plucky, too, I can tell you."

We drew up at the door, and a kindly-faced woman came out with the post-bag. She gave us a little nod of greeting, and retreated modestly into the doorway. Two or three tow-headed children peeped out from behind her skirts at the stage people.

"The schoolma'am's going down this morning," said the postmistress.

"We're pretty well loaded," said Tennessee.

I thought so, too, and wondered where we would put the schoolmistress; but Tennessee seemed equal to any emergency. He started the horses.

"Good-morning to you, ma'am," he called to the woman, and wafted a kiss from the tips of his fingers, presumably to the children, but I thought with intention to show us how he managed these things with the ladies. A few rods beyond we stopped, and a sunburnt girl came out.

"Good-morning," she called, in a fresh, clear voice, "have you room for me?"

"Oh, yes," answered the obliging Tennessee, "always room for one more. Got any trunks?"

"Yes; two," and she glanced apologetically at two enormous Saratogas which stood just by the door.

We wondered where they would be put, but Tennessee never hesitated. The trunks were placed somewhere in the back, and our driver sprang nimbly into his seat again. We started off at a brisk trot, and Tennessee launched forth in a string of thrilling narrative.

"See that hole over there?" he said. "A friend of mine dug out three thousand dollars in one day there. He wants to sell the mine now. I'm the agent. I tell you that I get more of that sort of thing than I can attend to. Why, I make more than four times my wages just selling out claims. Don't want to buy a claim now, do you? No? Well, there's something more interesting than claims—for a paying business beats claims all hollow—that's stage robbing. See that tree over yonder? That's where I was held up last time—robber didn't get anything, though. That's onst when he miscalculated."

I looked about quickly. We were now in a dusty wilderness of pine and chapparal. Not a sign of human habitation near. Tennessee saw my nervous glance.

"Mighty lonesome-looking now, ain't it? See them bullet holes in my stage cover? Them was put in when we were attacked by six road-agents over here by Joaquin Murietta's old home."

I felt my blood run cold. I had not seen the bullet holes before. The timid man gave vent to an audible "Ah!" and the others preserved an awe-struck silence.

"Why," continued Tennessee, "I guess every stone an' tree has hid its road-agent some time or other 'long here. I've had fifteen or twenty holds-ups, an' that's nothing compared with some of the old-timers."

"Do you think there is any danger at this particular time?" inquired the timid man.

"Why, that's hard to tell," said Tennessee dubiously. "It was just here where we had that last hold up two months ago, an' one of the passengers an' two of the road-agents was killed. The papers never got the straight of that. You see, it was that hold-up which showed me that the little widder postmistress was stuck on me.

"I was coming along here that day—had on a Wells-Fargo shot-gun messenger and a lot of passengers. There was about a hundred thousand dollars in bullion under the seat, an' the messenger held a loaded gun in his hand all the time. When we got just 'bout here coming up the hill, I saw the bushes move right there, an' I said, kinder under my breath, 'road-agents!' I whipped out my pistol, an' the messenger aimed his gun; but, Lord! who do you think it was? Why, the little postmistress back there. We came nigh shooting her. She looked frightened nigh to death, an' was white as a ghost.

"'Don't shoot,' she said, kinder soft like. 'Four men are going to rob the stage. I heard them planning it. They want to stop you before you git to the top of the grade, but if you hurry, you'll get there first, and maybe can git away on the down grade. Good-bye, and be quick,' an' she got out of sight in a twinkling. Done that for me, you see. We never waited to thank her. That's one thing I object to in these here mountains—you've got to sacrifice politeness sometimes.

"Well, I just gave my horses a cut, an' they jumped forward. That plucky little woman got out of sight pretty quick—had a horse, I guess. Well, we got to the top of the hill first, an' by Jupiter snupgrass!—excuse *me*, I always use strong language when I git excited—right on the other side was four masked men a-coming it up the hill as hard as they could tear."

There was a breathless silence on the stage coach. The horses were pulling up that very hill, and there was a possibility that we would be held up, too. Tennessee was getting a quid of tobacco. He kept us hanging breathless on his words until he had the morsel well rolled into his cheek.

"The first glimpse they caught of us they jumped behind trees an' called 'Halt!' but we were on the brow of the hill, an' I was prepared. I'd fastened the reins 'round my waist, an' guided with one hand while I used the other for my sixshooter. The messenger shouted 'Let her go!' It was just here, ladies—we left two men stretched out. I killed two road-agents, an' wounded another. The shooting scared the horses, or I think I'd have finished all four. That durned messenger—excuse *me*—was so scared that he shot one of my horses. Not used to the biz, you see. Of course, the horses stampeded—it's bad enough to hear the firing without being peppered by an unresponsible man who is frightened into next week.

"Well, they started on the dead run down the grade, an' I had to drop my pistol and hang on to the lines. I tell you, we buzzed round them turns—sometimes two wheels standing off the grade to onst. When we reached the bottom of the hill down at the station, the old hoss dropped dead, an' the people on the stage just come up to me a-crying an' a-thanking me for saving their lives, and took on turruble.

"Look!—at that rock," he ejaculated. We gazed with startled eyes in the direction indicated. "Oh, I guess it's all right this time, but I always expect to have a man step out from behind that rock—finest place to rob a stage in the country. Two men held me up there about fifteen years ago, when I first began to drive here—didn't get anything, though. Now, we're past. Guess that's a sigh of relief, ain't it? This is a mighty dangerous country 'bout here, but I guess I'll git you through, ladies. Don't you fear. If we git attacked, just keep still—keep perfectly cool 'an ca'm an' you probably won't get more than two or three scattering shots."

We were all frightened by this time. The little schoolmistress on the back held her peace, but the rest of us were looking about nervously, and trusting our lives to this wonderful Tennessee. The pretty widow was no longer haughty and distant, but at every noise in the bush grasped the brawny arm of the driver and looked appealingly into his face.

"Now, ladies, when we start down this mountain, we are on the home-stretch to Angel's. Just one mile more. I always feel glad when we pass this knoll. Joaquin Murietta held me upright here the first month I was on the road. I had five miners on board, an' they showed fight, an' they got the worst of it, too. I just held my horses an' kept cool. Indiscretion is no kind of valour, you know. Well, Murietta strung up every one of them five miners to a tree, an' told me to go into Angel's an' say that Tennessee was the only man about with any sense, an' for other people to take warning. That's the old tree over there, an' there's the ropes yet. See them right there."

We instinctively glanced in the direction indicated by the whip which Tennessee held outstretched in his right hand, and there were the ropes still dangling from a thick branch which overhung the road.

"Oh, do drive on fast—do drive on!" we all exclaimed shudderingly.

"Well, I guess we'll have to go on, an' pretty fast, too. The horses can't hold back much on this down grade. If we turn over, ladies, I guess it will be on my side, so just be prepared to swing yourselves out."

Down we started. In a few seconds the horses were trotting, and in a few seconds more they were galloping. Five badly-frightened people hung on in desperation to the seats, and the pretty widow hung to the arm of Tennessee. His feet were braced against the dashboard, and his body was stiffened out as he hung on to the taut lines.

Swinging, bumping, pitching, we careered down the long hill, and went tearing into the little mining camp of Angel's.

We drew up with a flourish at the door of the primitive hotel, and fairly fell into the arms of Tennessee, who had sprung to the ground to receive us.

Six thankful, admiring people stood in the tiny hotel parlour awaiting the next stage, and asking the driver of the present one what he'd have to drink. We were all so grateful to him. The little brown schoolmistress was there, too.

"Why," said the little widow, "I think I should have died of fright on that dreadful road if it hadn't been for Tennessee."

"Yes, indeed," cried number two. "The very thought of that brave man kept me calm, and I know if anyone else had been driving we would have been killed surely. What a splendid fellow he is!"

"Just the kind of driver I have always heard about," cried number three.

"You could pick him out from a thousand as a regular old stager," said number four.

"He's the bravest man I've ever seen," said number five.

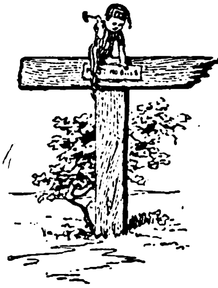
"He's a great, big-hearted, fine fellow," said the timid man, "and a genuine hero, too. I'm thankful we had such a competent man over that fearful road. I don't know what would have happened to us with an incapable driver."

"Pardon me," said the little brown schoolmistress, who had been a silent listener, "but I think you are all mistaken. Tennessee isn't much of a hero. He's only been in the State two weeks, and to judge by his driving he never saw a stage before, and—well—the postmistress is married to the shot-gun messenger, and all those tall stories he told you happened to Fred Green, who drove you down to Murphy's this morning. Evidently Tennessee knew what was expected of him, and proved himself equal to the occasion."

S. W. Belcher.

FIRE CRACKERS
FIRE CRACKERS
FIRE CRACKERS
FIRE CRACKERS

A Phial of Quicksilver



THE first two races of the day had been run, and now was to come the event of the year in the sporting neighbourhood of a certain county town in Loamshire: "The Top Boots Hunters' Steeplechase Plate," for horses regularly hunted during the past season with the Loamshire Hounds; prize, a valuable Cup; conditions, three miles over a fair hunting country, gentleman riders up.

The number of entries was just a dozen, amongst them being Mr. Spriggs' Shuffler (owner up), and Mr. Fred. Bolton's Carmen, to be ridden by the owner's particular friend, Will Walker, one of the most popular men in the neighbourhood. The interest of the forthcoming race had centred itself between these two, partly because it was known that they were immeasurably superior to any other horses in the race, that they were considered to be about as equally matched as any two horses could be, and the same weight having been allotted to each—eleven stone—it was thought by those best qualified to form an accurate opinion, that—bar accidents—one or other was almost sure to win.

There was also a spice of romance about the event, it being an open secret that one of the prettiest girls in the county, Miss Marriott, known to her intimate friends as Marie, was a special object of attraction to both Spriggs and Walker, and although the young lady had hitherto, to all outward appearances, shown equal preference to both, it was hinted that possibly the winner of the Cup might succeed in winning another prize of a very different description.

"If I could only be sure of her, my dear fellow, I wouldn't mind a bit," was Will Walker's remark to his chum Bolton, as they strolled up and down in the roped-off space designated by courtesy the saddling inclosure, the black mare Carmen, with her bridle loosely hanging on his arm, walking by his side as sedately as if equine vice was a thing that had never so much as entered her shapely little head.

"Well, old man, if you can't win on her, nobody can; she goes kinder with you than anybody else."

"It is very good of you to say so, but"—with a sigh—"I wish I could be sure of her—more depends on my winning this race than I dare to think of; and whereas one day she is as easy to ride as sitting in an armchair, all at once some little trifle upsets her, and it is all I can do to hold her. I hope she will be on her good behaviour to-day, and then — "

"Poor Mr. Walker," mocked a girl's fresh voice, "he would like Carmen to have no will of her own at all. That is a man's view of the whole duty of our sex nowadays, it appears," and she shook her head as implying the unjustness of the imputation.

A pained flush was the young man's silent rejoinder, and Marie, like the good-hearted girl she was, repented instantly of her thoughtless remark. Patting the mare's silken coat, she addressed her in a coaxing tone: "Now we are going to be on our best behaviour to-day, are we not?"

The expression on Walker's face changed instantaneously, and, raising his hat with a smile, he said: "It is very good of you to try and imbue Carmen with a sense of her duty, and I hope we may be lucky enough to win the Cup."

"That's better, Walker; I have been telling him, Miss Marriott, that our friend Spriggs' Shuffler is beyond doubt an excellent horse, and he won't miss winning for want of skill on his jockey's part, for although Spriggs is no favourite of mine, he is admittedly a first-class horseman; but then, as I was saying to Will, the mare has a wonderful turn of speed, and she always seems to do her best when he is on her. Hallo! here comes the man himself. How d'ye do, Spriggs? We were just calculating what chance my mare has of beating your horse."

"I suppose you have quite made up your mind to win, Mr. Spriggs?"

"Far from it, Miss Marriott. It is, I think, likely to be a close thing between us, and I think we both mean to do our best—don't we, Walker? Nothing venture nothing have." This with a certain emphasis that did not escape the notice of at least one of the assembled trio.

"An excellent motto, Mr. Spriggs, but for the honour of my sex I mean to pin my faith to the mare; but don't you think it is unfair for her; she is such a little thing compared to your big horse, to have to carry exactly the same weight. I see"—looking at her card—"each has eleven stone."

"If Spriggs would only concede me, say, seven pounds, or even five, I should feel much easier in my mind, that's all I can say."

"I dare say you would, my dear fellow; but all's fair in love and war, and you knew the conditions as soon as the weights were published."

"Well, it's no use talking now, I suppose, Jack," said Marie, turning to her brother. "I am going to bet you a dozen pairs of gloves that Carmen wins. Not that I anticipate that you will buy them for me if she does; that's the worst of betting with one's own brother."

"May I be allowed to accept the bet instead?" said Spriggs.

"No, thanks," with a slight flush. "Jack shall be my bookmaker, and, I hope, glove-provider for this occasion, at all events."

"Now Jack, come along, mamma will be wondering where I have got to, and Mr. Walker and Mr. Spriggs will soon be making their way to the starting post; there goes the saddling bell. You can't both win, gentlemen"—making a demure courtesy—"but I hope one or other of you may; we don't want the Cup to go out of our own neighbourhood."

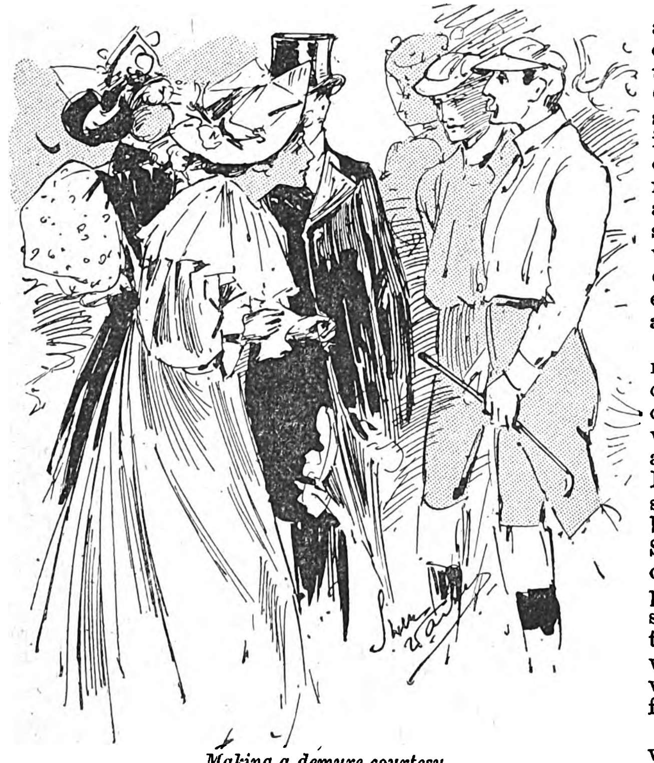
"Was it my fancy, I wonder?" mused Bolton to himself, as he and Walker moved away in one direction, whilst Spriggs went to where his horse was being led up and down by a groom, "but she certainly put Walker's name first, and didn't she refuse Spriggs' offer to bet with her pretty quick? Let me give you a leg up."

"No thanks, Carmen always stands better if I mount her my own way. Now then, old girl, steady does it;" and with the easy spring of a practised horseman, Walker swung himself lightly into the saddle.

A few minutes later saw the twelve competitors cantering down to the starting post, and as Walker passed Bolton, the latter noted with satisfaction that the mare was going easily, and not fretting or pulling away at her bridle.

"I hope you will win, old chap."

"And so do I, Fred, more than I can tell you. Well, it will be soon over anyway; Carmen is going like an angel."



Making a demure courtesy.

The crowd of onlookers—keen sportsmen everyone of them—were loud in their praises of the two favourites, Carmen and Shuffler, the other ten hardly coming in for any attention.

"The horse will beat the mare, I suppose," said a burly farmer to the man next to him—Teddy Geall—who was known to be part owner of Shuffler with Spriggs.

"He ought to; o' course, he ought to; but I wish to goodness I was riding instead of Spriggs, and I would have been but for this confounded knee of mine. I don't say Spriggs can't ride as well, or better, maybe, than I can, but then, you see, he has an old grudge against Walker, and now here's this girl come atween them, and all Spriggs cares about is to stop the mare from winning, and if he can do that he'd as lief as not throw the race away! fool that he is! and a nice thing that would be for me. I stand to win or lose a lot more than I can afford, bad luck to it, I do."

"Can you tell me what the weights are, sir?" queried a bystander.

"Weights? Who said anything about weights? I beg your pardon, you must be a stranger, sir. I thought everybody on the course knew they all carry the same in this race—eleven stone."

"Thanks. I heard you speaking of Shuffler a minute or two ago, and I wondered what he was carrying, that's all."

"Quite so, quite so; he ought to win, too; the weight won't stop him, anyway."

"A good many people seem to think that the little black mare will stand a good chance."

"And I dare say they're quite right, too; but my opinion is the horse will beat her. By Jove they're off! No, a false start! Shuffler's at his old trick again," as the big chestnut dashed past alone, his rider having apparently lost entire control of him; at all events he only succeeded in pulling up after going several hundred yards immediately in the direction of the line of carriages, on one of which was seated Miss Marriott.

"That's taken a lot out of your friend's horse, I'm thinking."

"Yes, worse luck; I wonder what on earth Spriggs could have been thinking about."

"A nice thing you've gone and done," he shouted, as Spriggs repassed him.

"I should liked to have seen you hold him," was the reply.

"They're off this time right enough," was the shout a minute or two after, and so it was.

As the dozen horses, all well together thus early in the race, passed the spot where Teddy Geall and the others were standing, it was interesting to note the expression on the face of the two rivals. Walker looked anxious, but not despondent, whereas Spriggs wore a frown of grim determination in which envy, hatred, and malice all had a share.

On they went without mishap over the first two or three fences, and then came the water-jump, at which Shuffler, Carmen, and one of the outsiders, Merlin, raced at best speed, the mare being between the other two. Seeing what was in front of her, she mechanically pricked up her ears, and seemed gathering herself together for an effort which her rider well knew would land her well on the far side of the obstacle.

Just, however, as she was within a few yards of taking off, Shuffler swerved slightly—not sufficiently to substantiate a charge of foul-riding against her jockey, as it might, Walker realised, have been purely accidental; but it was, nevertheless, sufficient to cause her to refuse, and her rider felt that, in consequence, the odds were a good 100 to one against his winning the race. To his credit, be it said, he did not proceed to thrash her for what was obviously no fault of hers, but, quickly turning her round, set her going again, and in an instant was well over, with a yard or two to spare. But the ground lost took a lot of making up, and it was not until well into the straight run home that the mare could get on anything like terms with the horse who had effectually outdistanced all the others. Bit by bit the distance between the two became lessened, and the spectators were well-nigh frantic with excitement as they saw the finish would be a near thing after all.

"The mare wins! No she don't! By Jove, she does! Come on, Walker, you'll do it yet!" were some of the shouts that rent the air, and the bonny little mare struggled gamely on, but she could not *quite* manage it, and the judge's verdict was "won by a head."

A triumphant look overspread Spriggs' face as he turned round to look at his defeated rival, who had eased up his mare as soon as he possibly could, and was patting her neck, although he felt he had lost considerably more than the race itself.

Everybody was anxious to console him, and it was evidently a matter for general regret that he had lost; on the other hand, the congratulations bestowed upon the winner were by no means numerous, as he walked his horse back to the paddock to weigh in.

Just at the same moment, Marie was saying to her groom: "You are quite sure of what you say?"

"Saw it with my own eyes, miss."

"Then Mr. Walker must know it without a moment's delay."

The man sped away, and reached the weighing-room just as Spriggs was in the act of dismounting.

Having done so, he gave the poor brute a dig in the ribs. "If you hadn't bolted, you beast, it wouldn't have been such a near thing."

"Well, he won the race for us, anyway; so you needn't be hard on him now," was his partner's reply. "Here, you've dropped your handkerchief; shove it in your pocket," handing it to him as he spoke.

Walker, who had also dismounted, was standing by, disconsolately thinking of what might have been, when he heard a voice saying to one of the stewards: "An urgent message, sir, for Mr. Walker."

The steward beckoned to Will to come to him. "You had better hear what this man has to say, Walker."

"You want me? Nothing wrong, I hope? Your mistress?"

"No, sir, not the missus, but Miss Marie sent me, saying as you ought to know——"

"Ought to know what?"

"Why, that you've won the Cup, sir," said the groom.

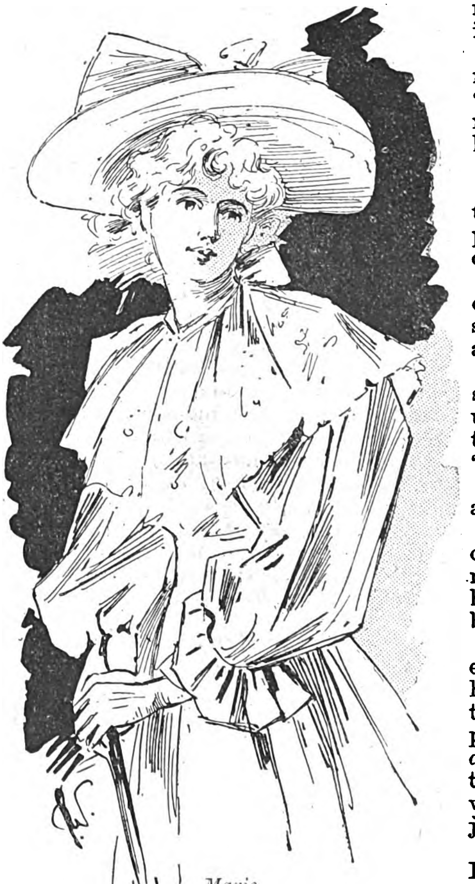
"Won the Cup? How?"

"Why, Mr. Spriggs didn't carry right weight; you object, sir, when he weighs in."

"Object? What's the good? He has just scaled, and the weight is right to an ounce. I heard the clerk of the course say so not a minute ago."

"Very well, sir, ask to see the weight cloth."

Spriggs' face suddenly assumed a livid paleness.



Marie.

"As second in the race Mr. Walker has a right to see the weights," interposed one of the stewards; "just turn them out."

The groom, who was close by, lost no time in obeying the order; there were two missing.

"Now what do you know about this, my man? Don't be afraid to speak out."

"Just this, sir; when Mr. Spriggs' horse bolted, I see him throw something away just as he was a pulling up, and if one of you gentlemen will be so good as to come with me to the spot, I think I can find the two missing weights."

The stewards looked at one another in consternation.

"This is a grave charge, Walker; but you yourself saw Mr. Spriggs weigh in, and he drew the full eleven stone."

"Yes, in spite of two weights being missing."

The steward turned to Spriggs.

"Have you any explanation to offer, sir?"

"If a groom's word is to be taken before that of a member of this Hunt, all I can say is——"

"It is my turn to speak, gentlemen, I think," interposed Walker. "Just now I saw Mr. Spriggs receive from his partner a handkerchief, and put it in his pocket."

"Really, gentlemen, I protest—"

"I am afraid we must ask you to submit it to examination; a pocket-handkerchief up or down can't make much difference."

"Take it then," said the now discomforted winner, as he hastily strode away, after throwing the article on the ground.

"By Jove! the man's right," said the steward, as he picked it up, and a small tin phial fell to the ground with a heavy thud. "Why, it is weighted!"

"What on earth is it? Let's have a look! Here, pass it this way!"

"I think you will find that phial contains quicksilver, unless I am mistaken," said a bookmaker; "I have known this dodge worked before."

"Let's weigh it. By Jove! it's exactly 5 lbs. Well, Walker, you have my best congratulations," said the steward, who had taken a prominent part in the unexpected *dénouement;* "if ever a man deserved to win a race you did, after the way you were baulked at the water-jump."

"Yes, it was a bit of a squeeze, I thought; but all's well that ends well. What about Mr. Geall's share in the business?"

"Yes, we shall have something to say to him presently. Of course, he and Spriggs must resign.

* * * * * *

"And so, Miss Marriott, thanks to your good efforts, Carmen has won the Cup, and you your gloves; and I say, Marie—Miss Marriott I mean, may I hope——"

Miss Marie's reply may be safely left to the reader's imagination, I think. S. J. F. N.

A BIT OF HUMAN NATURE

Only a little way from London, not half-a-dozen miles, in a country lane between Acton and Willesden, stands a little cottage. It looks very charming, this pleasant summer afternoon, and through the open window one can see a pleasantly furnished room and a young woman moving briskly to and fro as she makes preparations for the evening meal.

The little garden is gay with flowers, a blackbird in a wicker cage contributes his song of praise, and in the bright sunshine a little youngster, with chubby face and healthy brown legs and arms, sprawls upon the patch of grass in front of the cottage.

An old woman squats upon the roadside, and takes in the whole scene with a hungry glance.

Not a pleasant looking woman, with her dirty white hair, unkempt and dishevelled, and her red and blotchy face. She seems strangely out of the picture, this living bundle of rags, as she sits there munching a crust of bread, and indulging in idle speculation as to the occupants of the cottage.

"Yes, they're all right," she mutters, "plenty to eat and drink. I suppose it's a young couple not been married long, and that's their first little 'un. She's layin' the tea for 'im against 'im coming 'ome from work. I dare say they are 'appy. I wonder what it's like to be 'appy. You can't be 'appy, the chaplin used to say, unless you love someone. It's years since I did, and then it wasn't for long, not for long."

The girl inside the cottage opens the door and steps out into the sunshine. Catching her baby in her arms, she tosses him in the air, and then draws his laughing face close to her and kisses him.

With the child in her arms, she leans against the little gate waiting. "Waiting for 'er 'usband," sagely speculates the old woman; then suddenly: "Why, it's Emily, my daughter. Emily as I 'aven't seen for years. Yes, that's 'er, that's 'er. Why I'd know 'er among a million by the way she 'olds 'er 'ead. What a bit of luck. Why I 'aven't seen 'er not since they sent me to prison and 'er to a 'ome. 'Ow different she looks now. I wonder what she'll say when she sees me, 'er Ma," chuckles the woman. "It couldn't 'ave 'appened better. She'll 'ave to do something for me; so she ought. I brought 'er up, she's my daughter. I wonder if she told 'er 'usband who 'er mother was; p'raps I'd do better if I see 'er furst; she might come down 'ansome not to let 'er 'usband know. 'Ullo!"

The girl and the baby are waving their hands to someone coming along the road. The young wife's face brightens with happiness and love as her husband approaches—a fine sturdy young fellow, with broad shoulders and honest frank face.

"Jack, make haste," calls the girl; "baby and I are waiting; make haste, we've got such a lovely tea for you, haven't we baby?"

He reaches the gate, kisses them both, and then all three disappear into the cottage.

"Tea!" echoes the old woman, as she stands up. "Tea! I think, my dears, I'll join you. You've got a mother to provide for now, and it will cost you and your 'usband something before I'm satisfied," she chuckled again as she crossed the road.

The woman stopped when she reached the gate, and paused with her hand upon the latch.

A strange feeling which she had never experienced before took possession of her mind, a pure good feeling, an inspiration direct from God—"Be fair for once," it whispered. "You have never done anything for the girl except starve and beat her, don't spoil her life now."

"Leave 'er alone, why she's my daughter," and she half opened the gate. "Give up the chance of a 'ome and sovereigns and comfort, not me. Why should I?" As she stood at the gate wavering between good and evil, she could see her daughter through the open window —straight as an arrow, roses in her cheeks and happiness in her face.

How different when they were together last, both of them were standing in the charge room at Bishopsgate Police-station, and her daughter, a little thin-faced, hungry looking slip of a girl, hung on to her skirts, crying bitterly to her mother not to leave her.

But they were separated, the one to go to penal servitude, the other a Home.

"Do this one good deed," whispered the still small voice. "Be merciful. Her husband knows nothing, spare her and the child and him."

She turned quickly and walked from the place, pride in her eyes, and a new light in her heart, and yet withal a lurking fear; she knew herself too well. She had made this sacrifice. How long would it last? How long before hunger or drink or avarice tempted her back to the little cottage? She looked down upon the rags which covered her, the boots through which she could feel the sharp stones of the dusty road. She was old and disreputable; all she had in the world was a shilling and the memory of this one good action. With the money she determined to make her sacrifice complete.

* * * * *

Late that night there was almost a riot in a public house in Drury Lane, a white haired old woman, raving drunk, assaulted policemen, barmen, and bystanders indiscriminately. Shrieking defiance, she was taken to the station on a stretcher.

She smiled when she received her sentence, and still smiling left the dock. She was thinking, "My gal's safe now, safe from 'er mother."

E. C. Waggener.

The Pope's Mule.

AMONG all the choice sayings with which Provence peasants embellish their discourse I do not know of a more graphic or curious one than the following: For fifteen leagues round my mill, when they speak of a spiteful, vindictive man, they say: "He is like the Pope's mule, that kept her kick for seven years."

I have long sought the origin of this proverb, and have at last found what I wanted—the history of the mule, and of that famous kick. It is a pretty story, and I will try to tell it to you just as I read it yesterday morning in a manuscript coloured by time and well perfumed with dried lavender.

He who did not see Avignon in the days of the Popes has seen nothing. Never was there such a city for gaiety, animation, and *fêtes*. From morning till night there were processions and pilgrimages; streets strewn with flowers and hung with tapestry; soldiers singing Latin in the squares; cardinals arriving on the Rhone with galleys decked with flags and banners floating in the wind.

The houses which crowded about the grand papal palace hummed like bees round their hive with the tic-tac of the lace-looms, the flying of the shuttles, weaving the gold of the chasubles, the little hammers of the sculptors, the music of the lute-makers, and the songs of the weavers. Above was the constant ringing of the chimes, and below the constant drumming of the tambourines upon the bridge.

There was one Pope in particular—a good old man, called Boniface—and, oh, how many tears were shed at Avignon when he died! He was such an amiable and engaging prince; he smiled at you so sweetly from the back of his mule; and he gave you his benediction so politely, no matter whether you were a poor little madder-picker or a grand city magistrate. He was a true Pope of Yvetot—but of an Yvetot in Provence—with something subtle in his smile, a sprig of sweet marjoram in his hat, and not a sign of a sweetheart. The only sweetheart which this good father had ever known was his vineyard—a little vineyard which he himself had planted among the myrtles at Châteauneuf, three leagues from Avignon.

Next to his vineyard, the dearest thing in the world to the Pope was his mule. The good man was passionately fond of this beast. Every night before retiring he went to see that the stable door was closed, and that there was nothing lacking about the manger; and he never left the table without having prepared a great basin of French wine, with plenty of sugar and spices, which he took to her himself, despite the observations of his cardinals. But it must be admitted that the brute was worth the trouble. She was a beautiful black mule, with red spots, a glossy coat, large and full hindquarters, and sure of foot.

She had a haughty carriage of her little lean head, all harnessed with pompons, bows, silver bells, and ribbons. She was gentler than an angel, and had a naïve eye, and two long ears which were always jogging, and which gave her the appearance of a good girl. All Avignon respected her, and when she passed along the streets there was nothing in the way of politeness that was not shown to her, for everybody knew that this was the surest way of standing well at court, and that she, with her innocent air, had led more than one person to fortune. In proof of this latter, witness the remarkable adventures of Tistet Vedene.

Tistet Vedene was an impudent rascal whom his father, a gold engraver, had been obliged to drive from his house because he refused to work. For six months he was seen dragging his jacket through all the gutters of Avignon, but chiefly alongside of the papal palace, for the rogue had for some time been directing his mind towards the Pope's mule, and there was mischief in it, as you shall see.

One day when his holiness was walking with his beast under the ramparts, behold Tistet thus accosting him, with hands clasped in an attitude of admiration: "Ah! what a noble mule you have there, holy father. Stop a moment while I look at her. Ah, what a beautiful mule! The Emperor of Germany has not one equal to her!"

And he caressed her, and said to her, as sweetly as if she were a young lady: "Come here, my jewel, my treasure, my cunning pearl." The good Pope, greatly moved, said to himself: "What a nice little boy; how polite he is to my mule." And do you know what happened the next day? Tistet Vedene changed his old yellow jacket for a beautiful lace alb, a camail of violet silk, and buckled shoes; and he entered into the service of the Pope where hitherto nobody had ever been received except the sons of noblemen and the nephews of cardinals.

Nor did he stop there. Once in the palace, the rogue continued the game which had proved so profitable to him. He was insolent to everybody except the mule, upon whom he bestowed all his attentions. He was always to be seen about the courts of the palace with a handful of oats or a bunch of French grass, which he would shake gracefully, looking all the while at the holy father's balcony, as if to say: "Hey! Who is this for?" So well did this trick work, that the good Pope, who felt himself growing old, finally allowed him to watch over his stable, and to take the mule her basin of French wine—all of which did not please the cardinals very much, nor did the mule enjoy it.

At the time for serving the wine she now saw five or six little clerks, with their camails and their laces, thrusting themselves into her stable, and then, in a moment, there was a delicious odour of caramel and spices, and Tistet Vedene appeared bearing the basin of French wine.

From that instant the poor beast's martyrdom began. These cruel profligates brought the perfumed wine, which she loved so much, to her manger, and made her fill her nostrils with its odour, then snatched it away from her and poured it down their own gullets. Nor were they satisfied with stealing her wine, for all these little clerks became so many fiends after they had drunk it. One would pull her ears, another her tail. Quiquet would mount upon her back. Beluguet would try his cap upon her. And not one of the rogues imagined that with a single kick the poor beast could send them all into the polar star.

But no; one is not a Pope's mule, a mule of benedictions and indulgence for nothing. The boys had done their parts well, and she was not angry with them. It was only to Tistet Vedene that she wished any harm. When she felt him behind her, her foot itched for him; and naturally enough, such wicked tricks did he play upon her, and such cruelty did he concoct for her after his drinking. Did he not one day conceive the plan of making her ascend with him in the bell-tower to the very summit of the palace?

I am not telling an idle tale; two hundred thousand people of Provence saw the occurrence. You can imagine the terror of the unhappy mule, when, after having revolved for an hour in a spiral staircase, and climbed I know not how many steps, she suddenly found herself upon the platform, dazzled with light, and looking down one thousand feet, upon a fantastic Avignon, with its market sheds no bigger than hazel nuts, its papal soldiers like red ants, and, stretching across a thread of silver, a little microscopic bridge upon which the people danced!

The poor animal roved disconsolately about the platform, her mind full of Tistet Vedene. "Ah, you ruffian," she thought, "if I escape from here, what a kick you shall have to-morrow morning."

This thought of the kick put a little heart into her legs, and without it she would have dropped. At length the people arrived to bring her down, but it proved a serious affair. It was necessary to lower her with ropes, a jackscrew, and a handbarrow. And think what a humiliation it was for a Pope's mule to find herself dangling from such a height, and working her feet like a May bug on the end of a thread, and all Avignon looking at her!

The unhappy beast could not sleep that night on account of it. It seemed to her all the time as if she were still whirling round on that platform, with the city laughing at her from below. Then, too, she kept thinking of that infamous Tistet Vedene, and of the fine kick which she proposed to send after him the next morning. Ah, my friends, what a kick that was to be! The smoke of it would be visible from Pampeluna.

But while this beautiful reception was being prepared for Tistet in the stable, do you know what he was doing? He was singing and sailing down the Rhone on a papal galley, on his way to the court of Naples with a troop of young nobles, whom the city sent every year to Queen Joan to perfect themselves in diplomacy and good manners. Tistet was not of noble birth, but the Pope wished to reward him for the care which he had given to his beast, and especially for the activity which he had displayed on the day of her rescue from the tower.

So the mule was disappointed the next morning. "Ah! the ruffian! he suspected something," she thought, as she shook her bells with rage. "But no matter; go along, you wicked fellow; you will find your kick on your return. I will keep it for you." And she did keep it for him.

Seven years passed, and then Tistet Vedene returned from the court at Naples. He had not served his full time there, but he had heard that the first mustard-maker to the Pope had just died suddenly at Avignon, and, as the position seemed a good one to him, he had hurried back to apply for it. When this intriguer entered the hall of the palace the good father had trouble in recognising him, so large had he grown.

But, on the other hand, the good Pope had grown old, and could no longer see well without his glasses.

But Tistet, not at all intimidated, said:

"What, holy father, do you not know me? It is I—Tistet Vedene."

"Vedene?"

"Yes; you know me well—he who used to carry the French wine to your mule."

"Ah, yes, yes. I remember! A good little boy, that Tistet Vedene. And what is it that he now desires of us?"

"Oh, holy father, it is only a little thing that I have come to ask of you. By the way, have you your mule still? And is she well? Ah! so much the better. I came to ask you for the position of the first mustard-maker, who has just died."

"First mustard-maker! You! But you are too young. How old are you?"

"Twenty years and two months, illustrious pontiff; just five years older than your mule. Ah! the gallant beast. If you only knew how I loved that mule! How I languished for her in Italy! Would you not let me see her?"

"Yes, my child, you shall see her," said the Pope, greatly overcome; "and since you love her so much, I no longer wish you to live far away from her. From this day I make you my first mustard maker. My cardinals will cry out about it, but so much the worse for them. I am used to it. Come to us to-morrow at the close of vespers, and we will bestow upon you the insignia of your rank in the presence of our chapter, and then—I will take you to see the mule, and you shall go with us to visit the vineyard. Ha! ha!"

I need not tell you with what impatience Tistet awaited the morrow. And yet there was someone in the palace still happier and still more impatient than he, and this was the mule. From the moment of Vedene's return until vespers the next day, the terrible beast did not cease cramming herself with oats and shooting at the wall behind her with her hoofs. She was also preparing herself for the ceremony.

When vespers were over on the following day, Tistet made his *entrée* into the court of the palace.

He made a gallant salute, then started towards the high steps where the Pope was waiting to bestow on him the insignia of his rank—a spoon of yellow boxwood and a saffron coat. At the bottom of the staircase stood the mule, all harnessed and ready to set out for the vines. As he passed near her Tistet smiled, and stopped to give her two or three friendly pats on the back, looking all the while out of the corner of his eye to see whether the Pope was watching him. The position was auspicious. The mule gave a spring. "Take it! catch it! reprobate! Seven years have I kept it for you!" And she sent after him a kick so terrible that they saw the smoke of it from Pampeluna—a whirlwind of golden smoke in which fluttered a stork's feather—all that was left of the unlucky Tistet of Vedene!

The kicks of mules are not ordinarily so dreadful; but this was a papal mule, and only think how she had kept her kick for seven years! There is not on record a finer example of ecclesiastical spite. A. D.

THE CAVE OF THE DEAD.

FAR up in a rocky defile in the Everlasting Sierras of the land of the Montezumas, and overlooking a valley—the Valley of the Angels—rests the dwelling house attached to the Mines of the Holy Children, so named by the Jesuits far back in the dead past. A row of low, straggling adobe buildings reach up the cañon from the mill to a tiny plaza—a plaza containing a few stunted orange trees, a stone bench or two, and a broken fountain that never flows. Near the plaza stands the rude little chapel, so dilapidated in appearance that only a wooden cross lashed with raw-hide and leaning from the roof, and a cracked and clapperless bell hanging by the door, distinguish it from its surroundings as a house of God.

There is a house roofed with rough, red tiles terraced up on the mountain-side, above the church, and out in its wide portico, one summer afternoon, a young man rested in a hammock, carelessly swaying himself to and fro as his thoughts drifted back into the past. Near by, a girl—one of those creatures of the South through whose veins courses that Latin-Indian blood that turns to flame at a glance—stood gently pouring water from an earthenware jug into a flower-pot that hung suspended from the roof. Her dress was simple—some loose, white garment, exposing her arms and shoulders, with a skirt of red material, that fell only to a little below her knees. Great waves of dark hair fell unconfined down over her shoulders, and her eyes, black and brilliant, rested on the man.

The girl had emptied her jug and had placed it on the floor. She stood leaning against the doorway, slowly braiding her hair, and the man, turning suddenly in his hammock, exclaimed: "Ah! little one—Carmelita *mia*——come here."

"*Si seonr*," she answered as she moved towards him. "What is the señor's wish?"

As she reached his side, he threw his arms round her, and drawing her face down to his, pressed a kiss to her lips.

Like a flash she tore herself from him and stood trembling out of his reach, a flame of angry protest darting from the depths of her eyes as she cried: "*Caramba!* What would you!" Then she struck him with her clenched hand, and bursting into tears, passed into the house.

"The little vixen!" exclaimed the man. "Well, somehow, her lips seemed to say, 'drink me,' and I have kissed her, even if she is only my housekeeper's daughter." Then stretching back in his hammock, Maurice Stanton, superintendent of the Mines of the Holy Children, made himself comfortable for his midday *siesta*.

As the days sped by, he made his peace with Carmelita, and after a while they would sit out on the portico during the evening, talking, or would wander up the cañon to a shrine, where a rude figure of a Madonna, with the Blessed Babe in her arms, had been carved in the rock by hands crumbled to dust long years ago; there was a little spring there, too, and a stone seat beside it, and there, one evening, he passed his arm gently round her and drew her to him. She did not resist.

"Kiss me, Carmelita," he whispered; "kiss me," and as she complied he felt her tremble in his arms. He released her, and she dashed from him down the pathway, and—he knew that he had won her.

It was during the following month that Señor Don José Sandoval, owner of the Mines of the Holy Children, arrived from the City of Mexico on his semi-annual visit of inspection. Accompanying him were two ladies, his sister, the Señora Gonzales, and his foster-daughter, Señorita Guadalupe Calderon, the sole descendent of an old Castilian family.

It was late in the afternoon of the day of her arrival that Stanton met her. She was leaning against the balustrade of the portico, gazing out over the roofs of the low houses to where a flock of doves rose and fell like a soft, undulating cloud of grey, and long afterwards he remembered her as he saw her then, a tall girl, taller than most, with great brown eyes, and with a wealth of hair which turned almost auburn when touched by the rays of the sinking sun.

During that first evening she brought her guitar and sang for him—sang those soft, sweet songs of the South; and on the following night they had Carmelita come and play while they danced—waltzed—time and again in the portico, lighted only by the beams of the moon.

As the girl played, she watched them with eyes full of anger, and she suffered, suffered as keenly, as dumbly as any creature, wild or tame, to whom there is a soul. Suddenly she stopped, threw down the guitar, and, darting across the portico, left the house.

She hurried up the cañon until she came to the shrine, and then threw herself on the bench sobbing. "Oh, Blessed Mother," she moaned, "I love him so, I love him so! Why has she come! I hate her! Oh, how I hate her! She shall not take him from me, no! I'll kill her first!"

Her breath came short and fast as her bosom rose and fell irregularly. In her anger she sprang to her feet, and, as she paced up and down, the nails of her tightly clenched hands pressed into the flesh until they were damped by the blood that oozed out. But she felt no pain, not in her hands, but—her heart. "Mother of God," she moaned, "Blessed Mother, send him to me to-night, for I love him so. I waited last night so long, so long—and he was with her. Dear God, don't let me think of *her!* I'll pray—yes, I'll pray to the Virgin a hundred times, and she will hear and send him to me."

And there, still praying, two hours later Stanton found her. She was all unconscious of his presence until he softly called, "Carmelita!"

With a glad cry she sprang to her feet.

"Oh, the Blessed Lady!" she exclaimed beneath her breath, "she has heard my prayers and sent him." And as she stood there, the moonlight fell on her face, and he noticed that her cheeks were stained with tears.

"Why, Carmelita," he said, "you have been crying."

"Yes, señor—a little," she replied.

"But why, dear? Not for me?"

She cast her eyes down, and with a sigh nodded her head, and then burst into tears.

Gently he drew her to a seat on the bench, and, pressing her trembling form close to him, kissed her. "Carmelita, darling," he murmured, "stop crying and tell me what it is."

After awhile she ceased, and, freeing herself from his arms, turned to him and caught his face firmly between her hands. Gazing into his eyes, her own sparkling through her tears, she panted: "You love *me*, no?—*me?—me?* Mother of God what am I saying! You love *me?*—not *her*. Is it not so? She is nothing to you, no? You danced with her to-night, one—two—*so* many times. She shall not have you! You are *mine*, *mine!* Do you hear?"

He heard, and with something akin to fear, as he realised the intensity of her passion; yet he drew her back to his arms, and there, with her head pillowed on his shoulder, he told her that old, old story, and she—believed.

Whither he himself was drifting he did not know, neither did he care. He liked the charm of that dreamy, languorous life of the South, and his little affair with Carmelita was surely interesting; but what would the end be?—for end it must, and he thought that perhaps afterwards it might prove a dangerous amusement.

At times, even while with her, a vision of a girl with masses of reddish brown hair would come to him, and after awhile he realised that he loved Guadalupe. As the days came and passed away, he knew it for the truth, and knowing, he went to Carmelita, intending to tell her that all between them must end. But at the moment, thinking of the scene that must ensue, his courage failed him.

One evening, as Stanton was coming up from the mill, where he had been detained until late, he met Guadalupe as she came from the little church, and together they ascended the trail to the house. Then, in the portico, he placed her in an easy chair. Standing at its back, he took her hand in his, and she did not withdraw it. Then he told her of his love, and she threw her head back, raising her face to his. He bent and kissed her—and she promised to be his wife.

A low moan came from the shadow of the building, and Carmelita, standing there in the darkness, gazed at them with all the hatred of her wild nature aroused.

How she passed that night, she never knew; but in the morning she wandered, not knowing whither, up the cañon, past the shrine, and on until she came to where a precipitous bluff of rock abutted out from the mountain above. Here she unconsciously left the trail and climbed to its foot, where, turning a projecting ledge, she paused, and a fear came to her, for she stood before the entrance to the Cave of the Dead, an ancient burial-place of the Indians.

She had never been there before, but she had heard strange tales told of that rude sepulchre, and she knew that behind the slab of rock—ingeniously arranged to open as a door, and fastened with a wooden bar that closed the entrance—was a natural vaulted chamber, and she shuddered as she thought of the mummified dead within. She had heard her father tell of how they were placed round the cave, kneeling and sitting as though in prayer, and of how hideous they appeared, with eyeless sockets and shrunken cheeks, their skin dark-brown and parchment-like, filled with wrinkles and drawn back from their glittering teeth, and with their long black hair falling over the rags, once blankets, that covered their forms, as they rested there in the awful stillness of the death that had claimed them for ages.

She descended to the trail again, and walked slowly back until she reached the shrine. There she paused, and gazing long at the Madonna and Babe, made the sign of the cross. Seating herself on the bench, she bowed her head on her hands.

As she sat there, Stanton came up the trail with some miners, and as he passed he requested her to tell them at the house that he would not return until late in the afternoon. She answered not, but her eyes filled with tears as she sat gazing off into space, while she suffered in silence.

An hour passed, and then she became conscious of someone approaching. Rising from her seat and peering down the trail, she saw Guadalupe coming slowly towards her, singing softly to herself. As she watched, she realised how beautiful the girl was, and the hatred in her heart broke into flame, and a thought flashed through her brain that caused her to tremble and grasp at the bench for support.

Then, acting on the spur of the moment, she rushed forward crying: "Señorita! Señorita Guadalupe! Oh, how can I tell you! Señor Stanton——"

The girl turned faint and gasped: "What!—what is it? Where is he?"

Reaching her side, Carmelita panted out: "In the cave up there. He fell and is hurt—he wants you. Come," and turning, she led the way at a rapid pace; and Guadalupe, doubting not, followed in an agony of fear.

Breathlessly the girls sped on. Nearing the cave, Carmelita darted ahead round the ledge that screened the entrance, and opening the door, passed in before Guadalupe came up. Then, reaching out her hands, she cried: "Here, quick! Take my hand and I will help you to enter," and the girl, complying, stood at her side.

Leading her through the gloom away from the door, Carmelita caught her by the shoulders.

"I hate you and your beauty," she cried. "You took him from me, and he was mine, all mine!"

"What mean you!" Guadalupe exclaimed, as she broke away from her in astonishment, and she called, "Maurice! Maurice!" but no answer came, save the echo of her voice.

As she called that name, Carmelita sprang upon her like a tigress, and bore her to the ground.

"Maurice!" she panted; "ah, you shall never see him again. *Diabla*, while you are buried here in your living grave, I will watch him—*suffer!*" In vain did Guadalupe struggle to escape from the now furious girl. "After you are dead," she continued, "*dead!*—do you hear?—dead like those forms round us, I will kill—*him!*" and she pressed her fingers into Guadalupe's throat until the girl gasped for breath.

Springing up at last, she rushed from the cave, securely fastened the door, and stood listening as the imprisoned girl dashed against it—too late! One scream and all was silent; for Guadalupe lay stretched in a merciful oblivion on the floor amid the dead.

For days the mountains and surrounding country were filled with searchers for the missing girl; but in vain, for not a trace of her could be found.

It was late in the night of the fifth day after her disappearance that Stanton, tired out and weary, yet unable to sleep, entered the little plaza, and, throwing himself on one of the old stone benches, sobbed out in his grief. How long he had remained there in his solitude he did not know; when, instinctively feeling the presence of another, he raised his eyes, and there, with a look of unmistakable scorn covering her face as she gazed down on him, stood Carmelita.

"Carmelita!—you!" he exclaimed.

"*Si, Señor*, I. You did not expect to see me, and too——" She did not finish, for he had dropped his head with a moan on the back of the bench. Then, as she stood there watching him, the truth came to her, that, after all, the hate she had allowed herself to imagine she felt for him was only a phase of her great love, and she dropped on her knees at his side. Winding her soft arms round him, she tried to draw his face down to hers.

"Carmelita," he said, as he put her gently from him, "all between us must end. I have lied to you, deceived you. I do not love you. To-morrow I will arrange in a way that will always keep you from want. Now, leave me, for I wish to be alone."

While he was speaking she rose to her feet, and stood with rigid limbs and clenched teeth, and as he ceased, she broke forth with a cry of rage:

"It is Guadalupe you love!" she cried, in her anger. "I heard you ask her to be your wife, but—she never will. No! no!" and she broke into a wild laugh, "She is dead by now—dead with the dead in the cave!"

Stanton sprang to his feet. "What, you daughter of Jezebel!" he shouted, and seizing her in his arms he lifted her up and dashed her from him with all his strength.

Don José and Stanton reached the cave just as the sun was rising over the distant mountains across the valley. With trembling hands they threw open the door and entered. At first, in the darkness, they could distinguish nothing, and then, as their eyes grew accustomed to the wan light, they saw—yes, there was Guadalupe standing before them, her dress disordered and torn, and her hair falling in a tangled mass over her face and shoulders. The fingers of one hand were pressed to her lips, and the other extended towards the kneeling forms of the dead. "Hush!" she whispered, "hush, they are praying—the fathers—wait! I will tell them you have come. Maybe they will not mind—they have been praying for so long, *so* long," and turning and saying: "Father Antonio, some visitors have come," she placed her hand on the shoulder of one of the dead. At the touch it crumbled with a dull rattle into a heap of bones and rags, throwing out a little cloud of stifling dust.

"It is horrible," moaned Don José, "oh, it is horrible—she has lost her mind! Guadalupe," he cried, stepping towards her, "don't you know me?"

She gazed at him for a moment, then slowly pacing the cave and winding her hair about her face, she murmured: "Maurice, my Maurice, is going to take me away. Oh, if he would only come; Guadalupe is so tired of waiting."

"Guadalupe," Stanton sobbed out, "Guadalupe, darling, I am Maurice. Come to me, dear."

She walked towards him, and standing there with her hands clasped across her breast, looked up into his eyes, her face kindling into transcendent beauty as she faintly smiled and slowly shook her head. "No," she said, "you are not Maurice—not my Maurice. I am to be his wife, and he loves me. No!—he is dead, he is hurt—he is in here—oh! I don't know—I can't find him," and dropping her clasped hands and bowing her head, she whispered: "He loves me—he loves me." Then stepping suddenly back, she threw her hands to her head, and, gazing at him with her great tawny eyes, "Maurice!" she screamed; "Maurice! save me!" and, as she tottered forward in a faint, he caught her in his arms.

Tenderly they took her from that place of the dead, and carefully they nursed her; but the shock had been too severe, and as the days passed away she sank lower and lower, until at last the end came.

It was not until then that she became conscious. She knew that she was dying, and bade them all farewell; though she had no fear of death, she wept, for it was so hard to leave that newly-found happiness in which she had lived but a few hours.

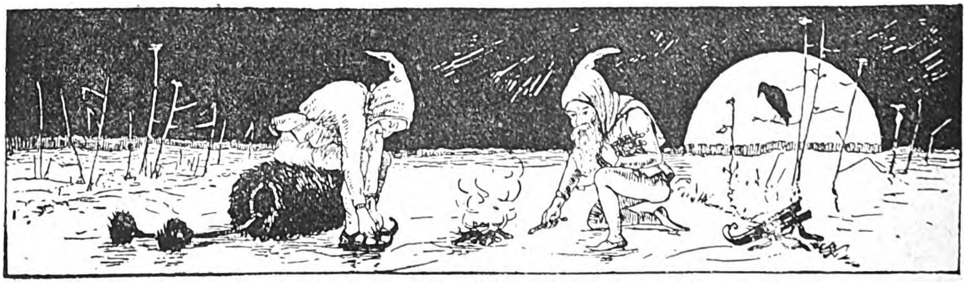
Late in the afternoon, as the last golden rays of the setting sun fell in through the open window and across her bed, she asked Stanton to take her in his arms. He gently raised her to his breast, where she rested quietly for a few minutes, and then whispered: "Maurice, darling, I am dying—kiss me, sweetheart."

He bent and pressed his lips to hers.

"Once again, Maurice, my darling," she said, "kiss me once again—the last—the very last time—for ever—Maurice—in heaven—my husband."

Her head fell back on his arm, and her sweet brown eyes, which never more would look on anything this side of heaven, rested on his face, as she passed to eternal peace down into the Valley of the Shadow.

G. W. Stealey.



"VOX HUMANA."

He had just come off the pier, pausing to light a cigarette on the Metropole steps, where easy wicker chairs stood invitingly.

A woman seated with a book in one of them attracted his attention. She was deep in the hopeless love affair of a young and beautiful heroine.

"What are you looking at?" asked his friend the Doctor.

"That woman—that *ugly* woman," emphasising the words. "Why, when there is so much beauty in the world, are such people allowed to live?"

That afternoon he was sauntering past the hotel drawing-room, when the sound of a rich clear voice reached him. It stirred his pulses with strange delight, and he stopped, entranced by the wealth of feeling in the tones. The voice swelled out louder and louder, sinking to a breathless whisper as he listened. The singer's expression brought a gasp of wonder to his lips. He dared not enter for fear of disturbing her, forgetting everything but the soul-stirring voice within.

"Fortunate woman," he muttered, "to be blessed with all that is divine in life. A soul for melody, a voice with which to express it, and intelligence to render her songs perfectly."

He was passionately fond of music; his love for it governed his life. Melody was the most powerful agency to rouse his emotions.

The singing ceased. He pictured a girl with angel's eyes, and a halo of golden hair.

He entered. There at the piano sat "the ugly woman"—the same ugly woman of the morning's pity. She wore a brown cloth coat and skirt, over a colourless blouse which had once been heliotrope. A tie of black and yellow stripes, and a sailor hat with a blue veil turned up across her forehead. Her nose was long, her eyes small, her mouth wide, and her figure dumpy. But beneath it lay that great gift of sound, the human voice, which had thrilled her silent listener. He advanced.

"Thank you," he said, simply but heartily. She smiled.

"You overheard my song?"

"Yes. Would you sing again?"

Something in his tone prevented "the ugly woman" being offended.

"If you will sit behind me," she replied abruptly, pointing to a chair. Why that demand? Ah! he thought he guessed. She had fairly nice hair, and a good shaped head, which was rather pretty—when he sat behind her.

That night as he smoked with his friend the Doctor, he said quite seriously:

"If I stay here much longer I shall fall in love."

"In love! With whom?"

"The ugly woman we saw this morning."

Day by day he heard her sing, till the magnetism of the well-loved sound enthralled him, and became part of his life; yet he would never have thought twice of her but for that mysterious organ within. It was the voice alone attracted him, and she knew it. Ah! there was the sting—she knew it!

She accepted him, however, willingly enough when his love was offered. They had parted for a season till the wedding day. She was glad of his absence, since a chill had seized her and affected her throat.

She called on "his friend the Doctor."

"I have lost my voice," she said. "Shall I get it back? That is all I want to know."

"You have neglected your illness," he replied examining her throat, "and I think it is very doubtful if you will ever recover your voice. Even should you be so fortunate in years to come, it can never be quite the same again. You have consumption of the throat and——"

He broke off shortly, for "the ugly woman's" face was transformed, and in its conflicts with emotion became almost beautiful. The small dull eyes expanded, flashing fury, the limp lips set, while her figure towered suddenly to a stately height. She clasped her hands over her forehead, swaying backwards and forwards in a paroxysm of despair.

"You must not take it so to heart," said the Doctor. "The voice is not everything."

"Oh! no," she laughed—"not everything. It is so little to lose—only a voice!" She staggered to the door.

"And yet it is a cruel fate," she continued, still in the same excited manner—"a cruel fate for an ugly woman, who has only her voice to rely on."

She spent the following night in sleepless anxiety, with her lover's image ever before her, knowing in those silent hours that everything which made life worth living had been taken from her grasp.

"I say," he said, when next he met the Doctor, "I hope it is nothing serious about her voice. I hear she hasn't been able to sing for the last three weeks, and—and——"

"You would get rather sick of her companionship without it," his friend replied. "The fact is, you have engaged yourself to a woman years your senior, simply for the sake of a beautiful, soul-stirring voice. Well, that won't last, old man. It may be very well for the time, but it isn't the right thing, depend upon it!"

"I am sure I am not such a cad as to back out of our compact now," he retorted self-righteously, "only I hope she will soon get well. I don't want an invalid wife, you know."

"She won't soon get well. She has consumption of the throat, and——"

"Well——well——"

"You may never hear that voice again."

He started, his selfish nature rebelling against the suggestion.

"You mean it is done for already," he replied angrily,

"As far as I know—yes."

He did not speak for a moment, but seemed to be thinking deeply.

"It is very hard lines on me," he said, "her losing her one redeeming point! But I won't break the engagement, it wouldn't be honourable."

His friend smiled, half pityingly, half cynically.

"I shall just let events shape themselves," he continued. "I'll go abroad for a bit, and—and not write often, you know. Perhaps in time she may grow less fond of me. I should not be surprised if the marriage never takes place now, but *I* won't break it off—you understand."

"Of course," replied the Doctor, still with the same expression hovering round his lips. "*You* won't break it off—*you* are an *honourable* man!"

Winifred Graham.

Almost a Tragedy.

I WAS spending the evening with my old chum, Harry Falkener, who was just then commencing to make himself known as a rising young barrister. We had dined in his rooms, and now were sitting, smoking comfortably, on the balcony of his house, indulging in a good talk. We had not met for some eighteen months, as I had been knocking about abroad a good bit, so we had plenty to do in exchanging confidences, and talking over our different experiences.

Suddenly he turned to me and said earnestly: "Do you believe in warnings or presentiments, old chap?"

"Certainly I do, to a certain extent," I answered; "but why?"

"Well, I will tell you. You know that I am not a bit nervous, or given to imagining things in the way of presentiments, dreams, second sight, and so on, so what happened to me a short time ago was something quite new.

"I went down to stay with the Burrells at their place in Norfolk for a few days this last June. I could not leave town till quite late in the afternoon, so what with long waits at country junctions, and then a drive of several miles from the station, it was past nine when I arrived at my destination. Dinner was over, so I had a quiet repast by myself, only seeing my host and hostess. The house seemed full of guests, Mrs. Burrell running through a long list of names for my benefit, but the people she mentioned were all strangers to me.

"I excused myself from appearing in the drawing-room that night, and, retiring to my room, commenced writing my diary. While I was thus occupied there came a tap at my door, and a man, quite a stranger to me, walked in. He was well dressed, in evening clothes, and was evidently a gentleman. I wondered what on earth he wanted, and my astonishment was greater still when he informed me that a lady wanted very much to speak to me for a minute, and asked me if I would go to her.

"I told him there must be some mistake, as I knew none of the guests in the house, and I had already seen my hostess. Despite repeated assurances on my part, he so insisted and begged me to come that my curiosity, being aroused, I at length complied with his request, and left my room with him. I followed him along the corridor, then through one or two turnings, till at length we came to a room, the door of which he opened and beckoned to me to come in.

"The room was prettily furnished as a boudoir, and rather dimly lighted, and at first I thought there was no one in it, but on glancing round I saw a girl, quite a stranger to me, lying on a sofa. She was so pretty that if I had ever met her before I should certainly not have forgotten her.

"We had hardly been in the room half a minute, and I was turning to my companion to ask him the meaning of this strange errand on which he had brought me, when to my horror I suddenly saw him spring at the girl, draw a dagger, and stab her. It all happened so quickly before I had time to do anything to avert the horrible deed, or even to realise the murderer's awful intention.

"Suddenly I found myself back in my own room. sitting at the writing-table as I had been when I was disturbed by my strange and unwelcome visitor. Glancing at my diary, which lay open as before on the table, to my astonishment I found the ink was still wet! I rubbed my eyes, and cudgelled my brains, wondering if I had been asleep and could possibly have dreamed such a horrible nightmare in so short a space of time.

"No other solution of the mystery could I find, think as I would. I had written my diary with an ordinary steel pen, which dries at the longest in three or four minutes. That I actually could have had any conversation with the stranger, and followed him to the scene of this horrible deed, seemed positively out of the question.

"I thought and pondered till I was tired, and at last got into bed, though my slumbers were anything but refreshing, and when I woke in the morning everything connected with this ghastly scene was as clear and as fresh in my memory as if I had only just witnessed it.

"I went down to breakfast, and, to my horror and astonishment, amongst the guests I recognised the very girl I had seen in my vision—or whatever it ought to be called—the night before.

"Her name, I found, was Maud Lefroy. She was an only child, and with her mother, who was a widow, was staying the week at the Burrells'.

"I naturally was very interested in them after my strange experience, and before the week was over I was on terms of good friendship with both mother and daughter, and they gave me their address, and pressed me warmly to come and see them in town.

"A day or two after my return to town I was walking along Piccadilly, when my attention became riveted on a man immediately in front of me. There was nothing remarkable in his appearance to justify my thus noticing him and singling him out amongst the crowd, but, despite myself, I kept on watching him, and a strange feeling of excitement came over me.

"At last I could stand it no longer, and was just going to overtake and pass him to see if it was anyone I knew, when he stopped suddenly to hail a hansom, and in doing so turned round, and I saw his face clearly. It was the face of the man in my dream, the man I had seen stab the girl on the sofa!

"For a moment I was almost paralysed; then, recovering myself, I jumped into the nearest hansom, and told the driver to follow carefully the one I had seen the stranger get into.

"This he did, and we found ourselves going down Piccadilly, past Hyde Park Corner, and presently got into Cadogan Square. My excitement increased, for No. 99, Cadogan Square was the address given to me by Mrs. Lefroy.

"The hansom drew up in front of the house, and on seeing the man standing on the door step ringing the bell, I got out and dismissed my cabman.

"By this time he had been admitted, and I walked on to make sure of the number. Yes, 99 was the number of the house he had entered, so I made up my mind at once to pay my long-promised visit to Mrs. Lefroy, and boldly rang the bell. I was admitted, and went upstairs wondering what was to be the upshot of this adventure. In the drawing-room I found both Mrs. Lefroy and her daughter talking to their visitor, who was introduced to me as Maud Lefroy's *fiancé*.

"Now, old chap, what do you think of my story? Unimaginative and unimpressionable as I am, I cannot forget my dream. It remains as fresh and clear in my memory as on the first day, and I feel certain I have not seen the end of all this. The wedding takes place next month, and I have made it my business to try and find out everything I can about Mr. Rivers, but have learned nothing except what everybody else knows about him—that he is a very good match, is an only son, and his parents are now dead.

"At first, in my horror and surprise on hearing of the engagement, I wondered if it was my duty to tell Mrs. Lefroy of my strange dream, but I could not quite convince myself I had any real right in mixing myself up and coming between two people who are devoted to each other. What do you think?"

"My opinion is that the dream, or vision, or whatever you like to call it, was simply the outcome of an overwrought mind. It is no uncommon thing for a man who exercises his brain to such an extent as you do to fall a victim to those occasional flights of fancy, and you have probably connected these two people with those who took part in this tragedy, because they more closely resemble the children of your imagination than anyone you happen to know."

And soon after that I said good-night and left, wondering if there was indeed anything in this strange story told me by my old friend, or whether overwork and mental excitement were alone responsible for a mere dream.

II.

Towards the end of September Harry Falkener and I found ourselves in the same house, staying with a mutual friend, who owned a moor in Aberdeenshire.

Rivers, whose marriage with Maud Lefroy was now ancient history, owned a moor a few miles away, and we had both promised to go on and spend a few days with them. I had not seen anything of them since the London season had ended, and Falkener informed me that he had not either. The friends we were now staying with only knew them slightly, and we heard very little about them, except that they had not been entertaining at all up in the North, which had been rather a matter of surprise, as Rivers' shooting was the best for miles round in that part of Aberdeenshire.

Somebody told us he had heard Rivers had not been well, and had been obliged to keep quiet.

On the morning of our departure for the Rivers' house, Falkener informed me that that very night he suffered that same experience which had so worried him at the Burrells', and he was sure it must mean that something was going to happen to the Rivers'.

We arrived at Glenaton only just in time to dress for dinner, and were warmly welcomed by Rivers and his wife. The latter, I thought, was looking older, and not as flourishing as when I had last seen her, but Rivers seemed to be perfectly well again, except for a slight irritability of temper, which showed itself now and then; and, indeed, I had never seen him in such good spirits. We found we were to be the only guests till the next day, when some more people were expected.

I went to bed pretty early, as we had had a hard day of it, and we had to be up in good time the next morning to make an early start, and within a minute or two of putting my head on the pillow I was sound asleep.

About midnight I was aroused by feeling myself vigorously shaken, and when I opened my eyes, I was startled by finding Falkener bending over me, his face white, and his eyes glistening.

"Wake up, Hugh," he exclaimed, still vigorously shaking me, and seeing that something really was the matter, I roused myself.

"I believe something is wrong with Rivers," he replied, "so I want you to hurry up and come with me."

While I quickly got into some clothes, he told me what had happened since I had retired. How Rivers had begun to get very excited, talking in the most extraordinary way, and had gone to Falkener's room after the latter had left him. "He wanted me," he continued, "to come with him to his wife's boudoir, saying she would like to see me, and we could all finish up our evening in there. I got rid of him at last, telling him I would follow him in a minute or two, as I determined to come and get hold of you. Coming along the corridor I heard his voice raised, shouting at someone, I expect his wife, so I think we—listen!" and he suddenly stopped. "What was that? Yes, good Heavens! it is. It is a woman's voice."

I listened for a second. Yes; there were sounds of loud voices, then half-stifled shrieks, and needing no further bidding, I dashed out of the room after Falkener, in the direction of the sounds, which seemed to come from a room at the end of the corridor.

A shriek greeted our ears as we rushed in, horrified and appalled at the sight which met our eyes.

On a sofa lay Mrs. Rivers, and bending over her was her husband, talking and gesticulating at her like a madman, while she lay cowering, unable to get away from him. He turned round at the noise of our entrance, and directly he became aware that they were no longer alone, quick as lightning he drew a dagger, and would have plunged it to his wife's heart had not Falkener and I, in the nick of time, seized him and wrested the weapon from him. Assistance was soon forthcoming, and the wretched man was quickly secured and put out of harm's way. Afterwards we learnt what had led to this dreadful scene.

It appeared, for the last two or three months, Rivers had been in a very unsettled state of health, both mentally and bodily. His illness took the form of violent fits of jealousy towards his unfortunate wife, who had never given him the slightest cause for his suspicions; and devoted as she was to him, her life the last few weeks had been a most miserable one.

Unfortunately, that very afternoon Mrs. Rivers had had a long visit from a cousin of hers, whom she had known from his boyhood. He happened to be staying in the neighbourhood, and had come over to see her.

Her husband had always been jealous of this cousin, as his affection for Maud Lefroy was an accepted fact, though on her side it had never been anything more than what she would naturally feel for anyone who had been like a brother to her in her childhood. This visit unluckily aroused all Rivers' sleeping jealousy afresh, and though he succeeded in controlling it before us, it smouldered all the evening, until it broke out in this appalling scene, which we luckily were in time to prevent becoming a tragedy.

W. H.

THE QUEEN OF NIGHT

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By HEADON HILL,

(Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," "The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.)

PROLOGUE.

An octagon room, softly lighted by hanging silver lamps, and carpeted with Eastern pile of such generous woof that footsteps fell noiseless; the incense-like odour of fragrant woods burning in an antique grate; one priceless picture—no more—on each of the eight walls; and a white-draped dining-table bright with the glitter of cut crystal and the dull sparkle of ruby wine. At the table, facing each other, two men in evening dress are seated. Empty coffee cups and the curling wreaths of cigarette smoke mark the close of the repast, and even as we ring up the curtain on this eventful drama one of them—the guest—makes a move preparatory to departure. He is a slim, elderly man, with stooping shoulders and a faded face of the aquiline type usually called, in cant phrase, aristocratic.

He has already half risen from the table, when he appears to remember something, and drawing forth a pocket-book he reseats himself, and poising a pencil sends a curious furtive glance in the direction of his host.

"By the way, Vizard," he says nervously, "I was so interested in what you were saying that I neglected details. Would you give me that address before I go?"

As he waits for the answer his eyes wander to the pictures, to the flower-crowned epergne, to the dishes of hothouse fruit—anywhere but to meet the calm gaze that is watching him from across the table. The fingers that hold the pencil tremble like aspen leaves.

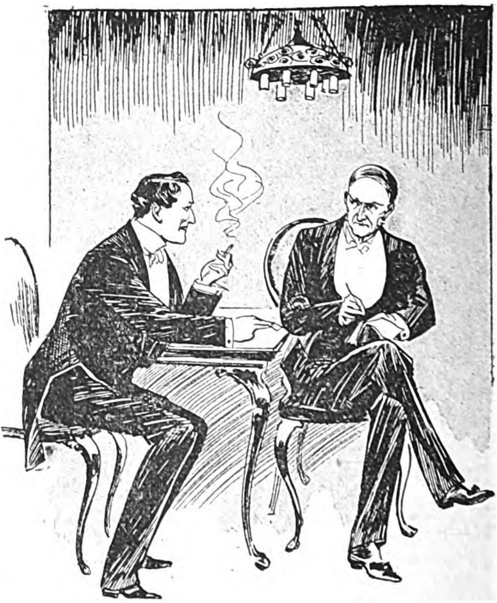
The voice that gives the information is clear-cut and musical. "My dear Sir Simon, of course I will," it says. "The name of the vessel is the *Queen of Night*, and the agents are Nathan and Co., 315, Harp Alley, Fenchurch Street. They have a West-End branch in Pall Mall, but if you require a *special* arrangement you would have to do business with Mr. Nathan himself—at the City address."

The host—he who answers the question—is by far the most striking personality in the room. Six feet high and splendidly proportioned, he attracts attention rather by the magnetic power of his well-chiselled face than by his inches and the muscular force revealed in the broad chest and massive shoulders. Clean-shaven, with square jowl and deep-set unfathomable eyes of steely grey, Gaston Vizard, the mystery of four London seasons, is known in the *beau monde* he frequents as the handsomest man about town.

Yet are there one or two keen observers—women mostly—who avow that they have surprised an expression on those readily-smiling lips that has turned them faint with fear. No one knows his origin, though that matters not nowadays when "dollars maketh man." He is immensely rich, and, in the jargon of society, is "received everywhere," justifying that reception, too, by the perfect breeding of his manners, and by the princely hospitality dispensed by him both here in his Park Lane mansion and at his country house in Hertfordshire. Even his nationality has never been rightly settled. Some say that he is of the old French *noblesse*, but born in America; others that he led a revolution in Chili and escaped, more fortunate than most of the kind, with his money and his life. For the rest, he might be any age from thirty to forty-five, and anyone meeting him in the street might take him for an officer of cavalry.

The guest writes down the address and again rises with the evident intention of taking his leave. Vizard comes round from his seat at table to accompany him to the hall, but once more he who has been called Sir Simon hesitates, and, with a quick nervous gesture, detains his host from leaving the room. The latter stops short with his hand on the door, and, towering over the shrinking figure, invites further questioning with a mere elevation of the eyebrows.

"It all seems so risky," falters the elder man. "How should I open up negotiations with Nathan—for what you call a special arrangement, I mean—without fear of compromise?"



Poising a pencil, sends a curious furtive glance in the direction of his host.

Vizard takes from his vest pocket a little sheaf of cards, neatly banded together, and, selecting one, hands it to his guest. "Give him that," he says. "Nathan will understand that you mean business, and are properly introduced. You need *tell* him nothing beyond the name, and *do* nothing but pay what he asks. The terms are high, but may be regarded in the light of an investment. There will be absolutely nothing in writing. It is the essence of the system to take all risks without possible compromise to clients."

Sir Simon glances at the card. It is blank, save for a red heart pierced by a black arrow. "Good God! how horrible! —a sort of modern *lettre de cachet*," he says shuddering. "And you are sure, Vizard, that this will be effective—that there will be no hitch! It would be terrible to tempt Fortune in such a way and fail."

There is a touch of amused contempt in Vizard's tone as he replies:

"There are no failures. If Miss Challenor takes the trip under the special arrangement, her health will receive the attention you require for her."

With these words he opens the door as though there is nothing more to be said, and leads his guest downstairs to a splendid entrance hall, where two footmen spring quickly to attention. One comes forward with Sir Simon's hat and Inverness cape, and the other flings open the front door to summon the waiting brougham. A few words of commonplace farewell are exchanged, and the carriage rolls away, leaving Vizard gazing after it from the top step with an inscrutable smile. There is nothing to distinguish the neatly-appointed equipage from the hundreds of similar ones it meets as it turns into Piccadilly; yet it bears the beginning of a train as deadly as any ever laid to mine of gunpowder.

After a minute, Vizard goes slowly upstairs again to the octagon room where he has entertained his guest. Touching a hidden spring in the wall, he reveals a cunningly concealed iron safe, whence he takes a small morocco bound ledger, in which he makes a few rapid entries. What he writes is in cypher, and quite unintelligible to anyone not possessing the key. This done, he replaces the book, relocks it in the safe, adjusts the secret panel, and is glancing at the clock, when, after knocking, a manservant enters to announce:

"Dr. Zavertal."

The subject of the announcement follows quickly into the room, and Vizard advances to greet him with the effusive cordiality of one who is pleased to see a congenial acquaintance. This only lasts, however, till the servant has closed the door and retired. The moment they are alone the show of demonstrative friendship is dropped on both sides for something closer still—for a brevity betokening that their relations are confidential and intimate.

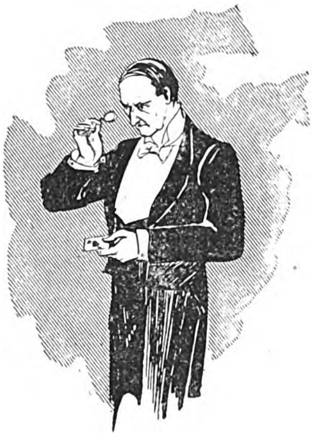
"Everything is in order?" inquires Vizard, not with any anxiety of manner, but as though some importance attached to the answer.

"A most satisfactory cruise," replies the Doctor, rubbing his hands softly together in true professional style, as he seats himself in an arm-chair with the air of being thoroughly at home. He is, in his way, almost as remarkable as his friend—this English-speaking medico with the curious foreign name. Short in stature, he is rotund and stout withal, and wears on his broad weather-browned face a cheerful expression of good fellowship that may well make him a favourite with his patients.

But looking closer, especially now that he has thrown restraint aside, one might see in his blue eyes, smiling though they are, the same steely coldness that has been noticed in Vizard's grey ones. Seen here for the first time in private, and narrowly studied, he would perhaps give the impression of a man who is always playing the part of "a genial soul"; and that the character, though not natural to him, has become so ingrained that he lays it aside with difficulty. Gradually, as he talks to his companion of strange doings on the sea, his face hardens, and the purring smoothness of his voice takes a more metallic ring.

Vizard, evidently knowing the Doctor's habits, mixes a glass of claret and water, and hands it to him without remark, as a matter of course. Then he leans his back against the mantelpiece and pursues his questioning:

"News of three of the 'specials' reached me in ordinary course of post. There was still one unaccounted for when you left Gibraltar?"



"A sort of modern lettre de cachet."

"That was Trefusis, the Tyneside coal-owning millionaire," says Zavertal, sipping his claret, "he died as we were crossing the Bay of Biscay. Hæmorrhage of the liver, with complications, I was able to certify."

The two men look at each other strangely. There is a dash of droll humour in the Doctor's eye, a cynical twist on Vizard's mouth. Then the latter says:

"That was rather leaving things to the last, was it not? The off-chance of having to bring him home for burial, I mean."

"There were circumstances to cause delay. Being in charge on the spot I have often to be guided by such. You can have no idea what trivial things occur to hamper me sometimes. I would rather bring a 'special' home again than take risks," replies the Doctor, with a tinge of remonstrance in his tone. "There was no difficulty whatever," he adds. "I was able to say that the nature of the case demanded immediate disposal of the remains. He was buried the same day at sea."

"Good," says Vizard. "The 'special' department is on a sound footing, then, and will show a handsome balance on the voyage. Is there anything fresh in ordinary administration?"

"Yes; we shall have to find a new skipper for next cruise," replies Zavertal, not, however, as though the information were of unusual importance. "Captain Luck expresses his intention of giving up the command, and I expect his resignation is on its way to Nathan by this time. On parting from me at the Docks this evening he said he had fully decided not to make another trip in the *Queen*."

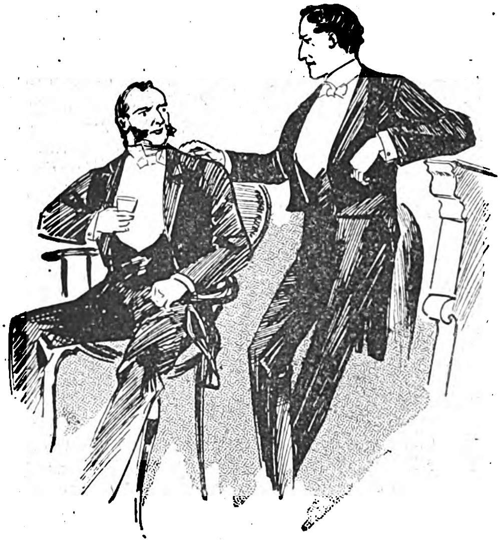
"He does not suspect?" says Vizard impassively.

"Oh, dear, no—nothing of that kind," returns the Doctor. "I flatter myself he would never have left the ship carrying so much as the germ of suspicion with him. He has been promised the command of a steamer in the Australian trade—a regular liner—and he thinks the prospect more certain than on a pleasure cruiser only running part of the year. He has been talking of chucking the berth these several voyages past."

"H'm," reflected Vizard aloud. "Luck combined the three essentials of good seamanship, social charm, and crass stupidity. It will be difficult to find such another all in a hurry, but it must be done. My 'special' arrangements for next cruise are nearly completed, and in a day or two we shall be able to give Nathan the date of sailing."

"Excellent Gaston," says the Doctor approvingly. "And how many 'special' patients do you hand over to me this time?"

"Two are finally settled. The young Earl of Darranmore, a boy of fourteen, fresh from Eton: and Desmond Orlebar, a country gentleman of Hampshire," replies Vizard with the coolness of an auctioneer cataloguing his "lots." "The first goes at the instance of his uncle, Ralph Darran, who is next heir to the title: and the second under the auspices of his wife, who I suppose has some feminine reason for desiring a change. Then to-night I have had Sir Simon Crawshay here. I have been playing the half-hearted coward quite a long while for his ward, the rich Miss Challenor, and he is as good as captured at last. He went away after dinner with the usual introduction to Nathan in his pocket, and you know how that pans out."


"Kennard is in Europe."

"Yes, they never draw back when they have confided in you so far as to extract that gentle missive," assents the Doctor. "We may count on three, then—all told—and quite as many as I care to have on one trip, now that the boat is so popular and crowded with ordinary pleasure seekers. By the way, that new rule, that 'specials' shall not be accompanied by the principals too, or by anyone cognisant of the private arrangement, is eminently satisfactory. When we first began we narrowly missed more than one miscarriage through clients, by being on board, having the chance to relent at the last moment."

"I thought that would strengthen the system and lighten the strain upon you," remarks Vizard with the lazy self-contentment of a man who has fathered a good idea. "And speaking of vigilance reminds me," he adds, stiffening up and taking a step forward to look down impressively into Zavertal's upturned eyes, "I had advices from Cincinnati a week ago that Kennard is in Europe."

The Doctor laughs, quite harshly for a man of such genial temperament, and for the space of two seconds the crowsfeet on his broad face deepen into visible channels. Then he says jauntily: "And what of that? I beat him before and could do it again. They make a little god of him in the States—as the greatest detective of the age—but he doesn't often meet *men*."

"Quite so," replied Vizard, "and his present journeyings can have no concern with us. But, as he alone knows your record, I thought you should be aware that he is on this side the Atlantic. Of myself he has no knowledge, for which, perhaps, he rather than I should be congratulated."

Doctor Zavertal's only answer is a smile of intense amusement. Then, after a pause, he rises, and, draining his glass, says with apparent irrelevance:

"The *Queen of Night* sinks all obstructions, eh, Gaston?"

CHAPTER I.

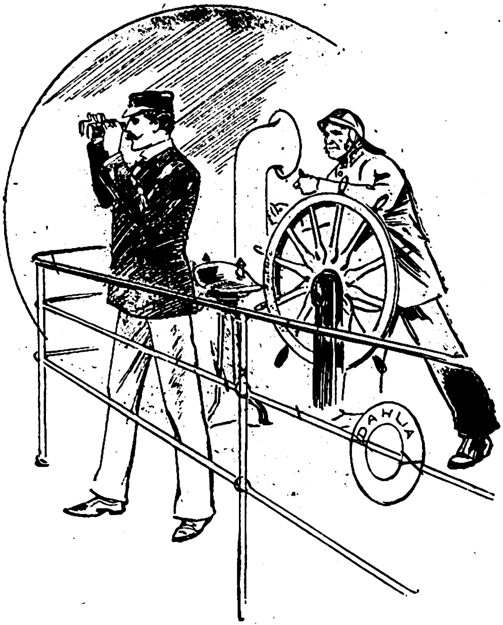
HARD LINES.

"DEUCE take the luck!" That was the phrase which embodied my sentiments as I kicked heels in the outer office of the Flower Steamship Company, while the directors deliberated on my case in the seclusion of the board-room. I was as certain of "the sack" as man could be. I knew it from the proverbial devotion of our board to red-tape; I knew it from the sympathetic glances flung at me by the clerks from behind the great brass-rimmed counters; I knew it from what good old Beatson—kindliest of skippers—prophesied when he promised to "speak a word"; and, above all, I knew it because I am a sailor, and, believing in presentiments, believed in that which told me that my hours as first officer of the *Dahlia* were numbered.

Directors are fond of letting their jaw-tackle run, so as they are safe for another ten minutes before they have me in for sentence, I may as well spend the interval in overhauling my log of what has thrown me on my beam-ends. My name is Cyril Forrester, at that time thirty years old, five feet ten in my stockings, sound in wind and limb, and holding a master's certificate in the mercantile marine, though never yet in command of a vessel, and under present circumstances, never likely to be. The Flower Line of steamships, as every one knows, plies between London and Calcutta, touching at the chief Mediterranean ports; and the little incident that gave those grim old hunkses in the board-room the chance to get their knives into me occurred on the last voyage out.

We had left London on a Tuesday afternoon, and all went well till the following Thursday morning, when we were steaming a steady fifteen knots across the mouth of the Channel. It was my watch, and except for the quartermaster, who was steering, I was alone upon the bridge, the Captain being at breakfast in the saloon. The weather was thick, with a nasty, choppy sea, and the third officer, who shared my charge of the deck, was forward on the fo'castle seeing that the look-out man didn't go to sleep.

Suddenly, my ears were startled by a scrunching crash from, as far as I could judge, about two hundred yards off on the port beam, followed by screams and shouts, which told me as plain as words could speak that two vessels were in collision close at hand. Almost at the same moment the haze broke a little, and showed me the black hull of a steam-collier slinking away to the westward, and a smart, yawl-



Except for the quarter-master, who was steering, I was alone upon the bridge.

rigged yacht cut down to the water's edge, and with scarcely a minute to float.

I altered the *Dahlia's* course so as to bring her round to the sinking craft, singing out at the same time to the third officer to clear away a boat. As we neared the yacht, I could see that all was confusion on her, and no wonder, her one boat was stove in, and the rascally collier, instead of standing by to help, was already out of sight in the mist. To make matters worse, I caught sight of ladies on the sloping deck, and I knew that unless the yawl floated a few minutes longer they would be in danger, since our ship came round slowly on a jammed helm.

I was keeping one eye on the men engaged in lowering the boat, and the other on the yacht, when she plunged forward, then staggered back and went down stern foremost, leaving her people struggling in the sea. Our boat was still at the davit, the freshly-painted gear working stiffly, and I could see that anyone who was not a strong swimmer might be swept away and drowned before they could be picked up. It was no time to reckon rules and consequences, and almost before I knew what I was going to do my shoes were kicked off, and I had taken a header from the bridge.

Our ship had greatly reduced the distance, and a few strokes brought me to the scene of the disaster, where about half a score of people were keeping themselves afloat in the best way known to them. Luckily the yacht was too small to have sucked them down. An elderly gentleman in flannels, with a life-belt on, was hanging on to a spar, and a man who looked like the sailing-master was supporting a lady who was screaming at the top of her voice some word which I could not make out. The rest, all men, and evidently the crew, were swimming strongly towards the *Dahlia.*

I was beginning to think that I had been rather too officious, when a draggled wisp of blue serge, rising in the water between me and the gentleman on the spar, caused me to change my mind and feel glad that I had come. It was the insensible form of a woman, floating limply to the surface for the first time after immersion, and on the point of sinking again when I managed to grab her by the arm. I noticed no more than that she was young and lay quite a featherweight in my embrace, for my chief concern was now with the arrival of the boat. Looking round I was glad to see it coming towards us fast, while the *Dahlia* herself was standing on at quarter speed lest she should run down the yacht's crew who were already reaching her side. Seeing how I was hampered, the third officer steered his boat straight for us, and, after picking us up, went on for the sailing-master and his burden, last of all taking in the man on the spar.

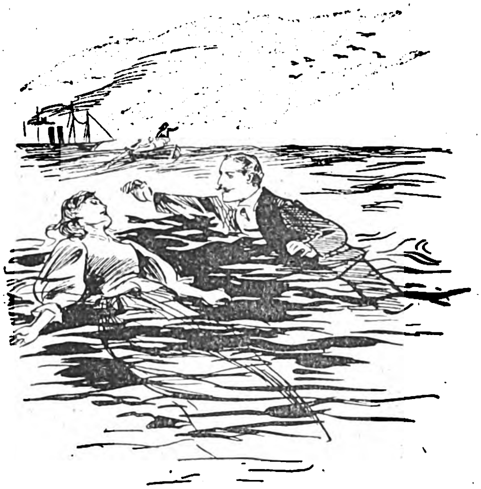
Five minutes later we were all safe on board the *Dahlia*, and the two ladies, who were alone the worse for the accident, were handed over to our surgeon and stewardess. The passengers, who had come up from the saloon to witness the rescue, crowded round me with the usual fuss of congratulation and curiosity, so that another ten minutes passed before I could slip into dry clothes and join the Captain on the bridge. He shook hands with me warmly, but he was looking as solemn as a church.

"This is going to end badly, Forrester, I am afraid," he said. "You only did what any decent chap would have done, but you know as well as I do that it was dead against the rules. To leave the bridge with no one in charge is a heinous crime with the wiseacres of Leadenhall Street, and I am bound to log the incident."

"I never gave the rule a thought," I said, "and I don't believe it would have made any difference if I had."

There having been no loss of life the excitement soon calmed down, and we stood on our course southward. It was ascertained that the sunken yacht *Norah* had been chartered for a channel cruise by Sir Simon Crawshay, the elderly man who had saved himself by clinging to a spar, and that the ladies were respectively his sister, Mrs. Beauchamp, and his ward, Miss Aline Challenor, the latter being the girl whom I had managed to pick up. In the course of the morning I heard that Miss Challenor had revived quickly under the surgeon's treatment, and that Sir Simon had decided to go on in the *Dahlia* to Naples, whence he would be able to take his party home overland more expeditiously than from Gibraltar.

I saw no more of the ladies that day, but during the afternoon, being off duty, I was talking to some of our own passengers on deck when Captain Beatson passed in conversation with Sir Simon. The latter had been fitted with dry clothes by some passenger, and he appeared to be none the worse for his dip. I cannot say that I took much of a liking for the man. I saw by the furtive way he kept his eyes askance that he had recognised me, and one would have thought that under the circumstances he would have wished to say something civil. But they passed and repassed several times on their promenade, Sir Simon always at that moment finding an object of interest at the other side of the deck, and Captain Beatson too busy with his discussion to notice surroundings. At about the fifth turn, however, the skipper's eyes chanced my way, and he at once brought his companion to a halt, introducing me as the officer who had got Miss Challenor into the boat.


It was the insensible form of a woman.

* * * * * *

It was not till the next morning that Aline Challenor appeared on deck, and I formed the acquaintance that was destined to lead to such wonderful things. I can see her now, as she came forward with both hands outstretched—a dainty fairy of a girl, with a clear fresh complexion and real violet eyes that could be frank without being forward. Her own simple blue serge yachting dress had been dried and put to rights for her, and I should never have recognised in the smart little figure the poor, pale, half-drowned creature whom I had held in my arms the day before. As she thanked me in a few frank words for my help I thought I had never seen such a pretty girl before, and—there! as the whole of the story hinges on it there is no need for secrecy—I fell over heels in love with her there and then.

"I am very glad to have been of use," I said, trying not to show my admiration in my face. "But there is really no reason why you especially should thank me. You see I just 'went it blind,' and it was as likely to have been one of the others I chanced upon as you. I am glad it wasn't, though."

"You shall not rob me of my gratitude," she replied. "At any rate it *didn't* happen to be one of the others, and it *did* happen to be me, and—and I shall never forget it."

From that beginning our friendship grew rapidly, as it only can on shipboard, and by the time the *Dahlia's* bows were turned eastward through the Straits, it had brightened into that later phase of friendship, in which, without awkwardness, there can be long silences. Sir Simon's demeanour towards me continued curt and distant—that of his sister, Mrs. Beauchamp, equally so—but he could not very well forbid his ward to speak to the man who had saved her life; and though it was plain that he viewed our increasing intimacy with dislike, he probably counted on the coming separation at Naples to put an end to it.

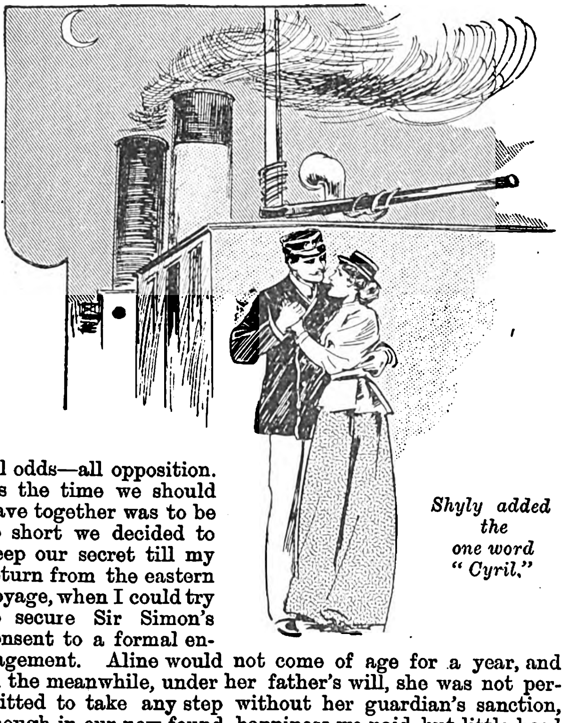
If so, he was out of his reckoning by about thirty hours. We were that time distant from our port of call, and I remember, as if it were yesterday, what a beautiful Mediterranean evening it was, when Aline and I shook off the chrysalis shell of friendship for the golden butterfly of love. I found her behind the aft wheelhouse—that time-honoured tryst of sea-going lovers—and for several minutes we watched the white streak eddying from the screw. Then I said:

"Aline, are you sorry that your voyage on the *Dahlia* is so nearly at an end?"

It was the first time I had called her by her Christian name, a fact of which the significance will be appreciated by those who have "been there" themselves. Her answer came, faltering a little, but prompt enough for me:

"You know I shall," and then after a pause was shyly added the one word—"Cyril."

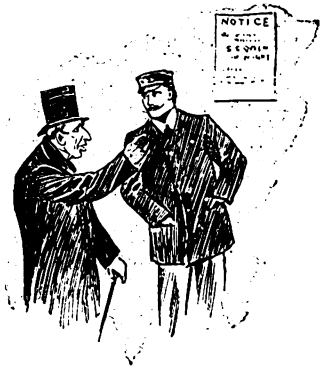
This is no love story—there is sterner work ahead—and I have not space, even if I had the will, to write down here the words in which my sweet girl and I plighted our troth. All I can say is, that though I had seen thirty years without any sweethearting, it came natural enough at last, and that when we left the shelter of the wheelhouse we were bound by every promise to be faithful to each other against all odds—all opposition. As the time we should have together was to be so short we decided to keep our secret till my return from the eastern voyage, when I could try to secure Sir Simon's consent to a formal engagement. Aline would not come of age for a year, and in the meanwhile, under her father's will, she was not permitted to take any step without her guardian's sanction, though in our new-found happiness we paid but little heed to possible opposition from that quarter. At the worst there would be but nine months from the date of my return to wait before she would be her own mistress.



Shyly added the one word "Cyril."

So we parted, full of hope and mutual trust, in the bright sunshine of Naples Bay, and here I was on the day after the *Dahlia's* return waiting to be carpeted for the "grave dereliction of duty" which had given Aline back her life. Even as I came to the end of my reverie a bell rang, and a clerk invited me to step into the board-room, where one glance at the faces of my censors told me my fate at once. The chairman, an old fellow whiskered all round his face like a cat, and having a fierce eye, rose at once—rose, too, as if he liked the job.

"We have fully considered your case, Mr. Forrester," he said. "While quite recognising the gallantry of your act, we cannot pass over the breach of the company's rule which forbids an officer to leave the bridge till another officer has come up to take his place. As a practical sailor you must see that the ship, and—ahem—the lives of the passengers, might be endangered by such an irregularity. We regret it exceedingly on many grounds, but your employment by the company must terminate with the voyage just concluded."



A little shrivelled old Jew.

On the whole I managed to keep my temper, but I said a few polite things about their rules which made the old gentlemen look very thoughtful before I bowed myself out and stepped down into the street, a cast-off servant. My first impulse was to charter a hansom and drive to the address in Grosvenor Square, at which Aline had said I should find her, but then there rushed over me the sudden remembrance that the situation had altered. For the present I was a broken man, and though I did not despair of getting another berth, a feeling of pride urged me to take some steps to that end before presenting myself to Sir Simon. I knew not then that my girl was a great heiress, and that a first mate's proposal for her hand would be nearly as presumptuous as that of a penniless pavement-trotter.

I knew a restaurant near Fenchurch Street Station, where the shipping newspapers were taken, and thither I made my way to see if the advertisement columns had anything in store for me. As I entered my eye was caught by a written notice stuck on the wall. It ran as follows:—

"The owners of the screw steamship the *Queen of Night*, 7,000 tons, used as a pleasure cruiser or ocean yacht, require a commander having the necessary certificates. In addition to the usual qualifications as to seamanship, etc., he must be of good social address and able to act as host to the passengers on terms of equality. Apply to Nathan and Co., 315, Harp Alley, Fenchurch Street."

As I finished reading, and before I had digested the words, a lean hand was laid upon my shoulder, while a garlic-flavoured voice croaked in my ear:

"The notish is to your liking, my young captain, I hope?"

Turning quickly on my heel I saw that he who had accosted me was a little shrivelled old Jew, or, rather, the quintessence of about fifty Jews boiled into one, so pronounced were the national characteristics of fleshy lip, hooked nose, and shining protuberant eyes that looked up at me with a cunning leer.

(*To be continued.*)

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THE MISERY OF CORPULENCY.

A copy has come to hand of the just issued 18th edition of Mr. F. Cecil Russell's "Corpulency, and the Cure" (246 pages), the clever little volume which, more than anything else, has brought a revolution in the treatment of obesity. That the still larger circulation implied by the issue of the new edition of this popular work is necessary is proved by such a paragraph as the following. It appears among the answers to correspondents in the "Dress and Fashion" column of a Sunday newspaper with a large circulation: "MISERABLE.—A young girl of 18 ought not to have such a large stomach that no dress looks well. Perhaps you require exercise and dieting." The helpless vagueness of this reply to a young girl who is naturally "miserable" on account of her unseemly obesity is a sufficient evidence that Mr. Russell does well in seeking to make known, even more widely than they are at present, the simplicity, the efficiency, the rapidity, and the delightful surroundings of his treatment for the reduction of superabundant fat. The young girl in question, who might exercise and diet herself for months without any appreciable improvement, may easily learn to imitate the example of thousands of ladies of all ages, who, by the use of Mr. Russell's pure vegetable preparation, have reduced their weight at the rate of pounds per week, and sometimes (but only when necessary, for the working of the cure is virtually automatic, stopping its effects when the normal limit is reached) stones per month. She may acquire this open secret—for the author makes no mystery about the ingredients of his recipe, by sending six penny stamps to Mr. Russell's offices, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., when a copy of the book will be sent post free. If she follows his instructions, "Miserable," without any fasting regimen, and without excessive exercise, will find herself being quickly reduced to shapely proportions, with an improved appetite, and full liberty to gratify it.

LONGEVITY AND CORPULENCY.

We have received a copy of the just issued 18th edition of Mr. F. Cecil Russell's "Corpulency, and the Cure" (Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.). This issue is in itself indicative of the widespread influence which the author now exercises as a successful expert in the treatment of obesity, while the additions to the evidence which, as a statistician, he is in the habit of collecting on the subject are suggestive of some curious reflections. It is evident that Mr. Russell is annually treating thousands of cases of excessive fat with a success which, in the rapidity and the permanence of its manifestation is truly marvellous. That the enormous popularity of his system is likely to increase in the future is most probable, because it is free from all the drawbacks which have rendered the Banting and other methods of reducing corpulence unacceptable to the majority of the sufferers, who have regarded these cures as rather worse than the complaint. By attacking the causes rather than the symptoms of obesity, he strengthens the digestive organs, thus actually increasing, instead of decreasing, the appetite, while the surplus weight is being reduced at a wonderfully rapid rate, amounting to pounds per week, and often stones per month. Add to this that there is no mystery about the nature of the absolutely innoculous preparation, the recipe for which Mr. Russell supplies in his capital little volume (256 pages), which may be obtained post free by sending six penny stamps to the author's offices, at the address given above. It seems certain, therefore, that, as a result of the happy revolution which the patient research of this specialist, with the aid of a distinguished physician as a collaborateur, has effected, the average of longevity will, before long, be appreciably raised. Obesity is, indeed, one of the few antagonistic influences remaining which, especially among the more prosperous classes, prevent the great majority of people of both sexes becoming centenarians. With advanced ideas in regard to wholesome food, clothing, and sanitary arrangements, it only remains to get rid of clogging fat to live an ideally hygienic, and therefore, a very prolonged life.

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EDITED BY
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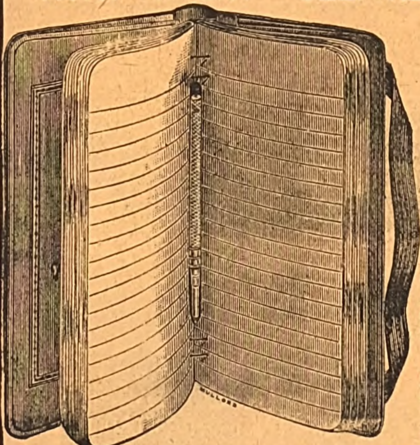

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SHORT STORIES

No. 351.] [One Penny.

Edited by

C. Arthur Pearson.

For the Week ending Sept. 21st, 1895.

Danforth's Dilemma.

Mr. HOWARD DANFORTH, alias John Detch, alias Mortimer Ritter, alias H. L. Davis—by which last name he was now registered in the office below—this gentleman of many appellations sat in his room on the third floor, before a roaring fire, toasting his shins and cogitating on his fortunes.

Looked at in one light, these were at the very ebb. If payment had been demanded he could not have found the money for the fire before which he was comforting himself, much less for the delectable dinner he had eaten some hours before. But payment was not demanded. Being a specious gentleman of good address, with a fine, open countenance and a large and stylish portmanteau, he was welcomed to the privileges of the accommodating hostelry without question.

Besides this outward show, which was always a large part of his stock-in-trade, his entire capital consisted of two shillings, a lucky farthing he kept to toss with, and an unlimited amount of nerve. Upon this latter Mr. Danforth relied, both to take him through certain tight places, and to replenish his funds when that became absolutely necessary. It had become necessary now, and he was only waiting until the proper time to take prompt and effective action.

The goddess Fortune, his only acknowledged mistress, had placed in his hands the opportunity for the replenishment of his purse. That opportunity took the shape of a bridal couple who had arrived that morning with an atmosphere of love and three trunks.

The groom was a slight, pale young fellow, with a downy moustache; the bride, a willowy girl, so enveloped in furs that one could not see her face, but with a deliciously small ankle, and a charming turn of the wrist when holding up her skirts.

These things Mr. Danforth admired as became a man of taste, but most of all was his attention attracted by the sparkling earrings that twinkled from under her veil. He was an amateur in diamonds, and knew a good thing when he saw it as well as Grubb, the pawnbroker—who, by the way, could be counted on to discount those same diamonds if luck turned that way. An examination of the visitors' book, and a little casual conversation with the clerk, showed these young people to be Francis Drummond and wife, and that they were established in a suite of rooms on the third floor front.

And so Mr. Danforth sat and meditated on these things, and waited for the clock in the church tower round the corner to strike three, which was his hour for business. This rule of action was based on a great deal of practical investigation as to the precise time when people sleep soundest. As every keen observer knows, two o'clock in the morning is the hour when the world turns over for good reasons, three o'clock is the time when it is again sleeping soundly.

By way of preparation, Mr. Danforth carefully removed his pointed patent leather shoes. Then he opened his bag, and extracted therefrom a pair of heavy felt slippers, which fastened about the ankle with elastic. He also

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took out a silver-mounted revolver. It was not loaded, and was only intended to display to persons who happened to be wakeful, and who were disposed to express surprise at the presence of an unknown and unbidden guest.

In all his experience, which extended over some five years of fortune-hunting in two hemispheres, he had met with but one man who cared to look into the muzzle of the revolver and at the same time make a disturbance. This man had compelled Mr. Danforth to hit him between the eyes with his left, and "upper cut" him with his right, before the intruder's exit was undisputed. He now adjusted the slippers, placed the ornamental firearm in his right hand coat pocket, and resumed his attitude of shin toasting.

Half an hour later, when the clock struck three, he was at the door of the suite on the third floor front. How he got through the door it is not necessary to state, but to a man of his experience a lock or a bolt was as little binding as a spider's thread, and to give away the secret of unbolting a door from the outside would be a poor bit of policy. He found himself in a dressing-room. With a match that had neither splutter nor smell he lighted the gas. In the bedroom beyond a tiny night-light was burning, and he paused for an instant at the door to make sure of the regular breathing of the sleepers. Then he turned to the toilet-table which stood between the windows. It was overspread with a most elaborate and tempting display. There were silver-backed brushes of all sizes and kinds, mirrors, cut glass perfume bottles, knives and scissors, and dainty powder boxes.

Mr. Danforth looked at all these with a loving eye; he could appreciate fine things, even though they belonged to another. He even touched his cheek with perfume, and smoothed his hair a little, as he looked into the mirror. He was really a good-looking fellow.

But other matters pressed. Opening the top drawer he fumbled through it. There was a profusion of neckties, collars, and cuffs, underclothing and fine linen. There were also links for the cuffs, studs of fine gold, and pins of precious stones, but Mr. Danforth put them aside. He opened the next drawer. The linen was finer. It was fluffed and ribboned. There was a suspiciously large pile of handkerchiefs in one corner. He lifted them and disclosed a jewel box of soft leather. His eyes sparkled, and he snapped up the lid. The diamonds within sparkled back at him—two as prettily set stones as he had ever seen, in earrings; a brooch of diamonds and rubies; a splendid tortoiseshell comb topped with rare diamonds. Then there were some rings of various sorts, a pretty little pearl necklace, and a bracelet.

He selected a large silk handkerchief and wrapped the jewels in it carefully, making a neat bundle, which he put into his left hand coat pocket. He closed the box and replaced it. He even laid back the linen, and smoothed it into place, for he liked order. Then, having put things as he found them, something possessed him to go into the further room where the sleepers were.

He walked quickly to the door, and after listening a minute, entered. The nightlight cast a dull glow over the objects in the room. The light fell on the face of the sleeping woman, and warmed into a pleasing colour the hair that lay on the pillow. She was lying on her side, with her arm thrown out, and her lips just parted in the effort of respiration. Mr. Danforth went a step nearer. She turned a little, and the yellow ruffle of her gown fell away from her throat. He could see her face clearly. He stopped, grasped nervously at the bedpost, and put his hand to his eyes; then it went involuntarily to his left pocket.

He leant farther over and peered hard into the girl's face. His lips smiled, but there was no smile in his eyes. "Louise!" he muttered, and the room with the little dot of light faded away.

In its place he saw a long stretch of white beach with the waves coming in, lap, lap. He saw a white umbrella, and under it a girl sketching, while at her feet lay a man reading aloud from a magazine. Once he caught up her hand and kissed it. The face of the girl was the same that lay on the pillow, and the man was Howard Danforth.

He thought of a good many things that had happened that summer, and he thought of them a little sadly. Things turned out queerly, very queerly. If it had not been for—but he smiled grimly, and put the thought from him.

The room seemed to be getting very hot. Perhaps he was nervous; yet there were few things, no matter how startling, that could upset his coolness. But what was all that rumble from the street below, and what—— He raised his head and sniffed at the air. Just then a cry floated up to him from below, a boy's shrill voice, and it said—"Fire!"

He went into the outer room. It was hotter than the other, and his nostrils smarted. He jerked open the door and went into the hall. The smoke rolled heavily along it. What was to be done must be done quickly. Catching up a white gown of flannel from a chair, he bounded back into the sleeping-room. He laid his hot hand on the forehead of the man. The presence wakened him, and he sat up wonderingly.

"Get up," said Danforth. "The place is on fire! Don't stop to dress, but tell your wife to throw on this gown. Hurry!"

"What is it?" said the girl, startled suddenly into consciousness. "What is it, Frank? Who was that?"

But Mr. Danforth was already in the outer room. He stepped to the window and looked down. The street was full of men. He felt for a rope that hung coiled on a hook by the window.

"We will try the staircase first," he said, as the Drummonds joined him. The husband had hurriedly donned his trousers, and was struggling with his coat.

"Howard, is it you?" exclaimed Mrs. Drummond. "How did you come to be here? And can I take nothing?" she added despairingly, as they ran into the hall.

"Nothing," he replied, ignoring the first question. He recalled afterwards how beautiful she looked in her loose white gown, with her hair fluffed about, and fright in her eyes.

They went to the staircase. A cloud of black smoke and red flame charged up at them.

"There's a staircase at the other end of the hall," said Drummond; "perhaps we could go by that."

"No use," panted Danforth, and he pointed to the flame that was already licking the corner at the far end. "We'll have to go by the window of your room."

They got into the room and shut the door. Danforth began to uncoil the big rope. "It's not very dangerous, if the fire doesn't get here before we get away. You must go first, Mrs. Drummond. Better put something under your arms so that the rope won't cut you. So;" and he slipped the loop over her shoulder and drew it tight. "Now, if you are ready, get out on the sill and let yourself over. We'll hold you perfectly secure, and it won't take a minute."

She hesitated for the shadow of a second. Her face grew white. Then she turned and kissed her husband, and stepped quickly upon the window-sill. She swung off, bumped against the wall, and cried out. The men lowered her rapidly, but for all that it seemed as if she would never reach the ground. It was getting hotter, and the little waves of smoke were oozing in by the door.

At last the rope slackened. They could see her lifted in the arms of the men, a white dot in the blackness. The rope swung free, and Danforth pulled it back with great jerks.

"No! No!" interposed Drummond. "I can slide down it. It will take too long to lower me, and you mustn't take any risks. Wait till I get my wife's jewels; I can save them." He made a dive for the drawer, and took out the jewel case, which he slipped into his pocket. The glass in the mirror cracked, and the flames peered in and lit up the room.

"Did you ever climb down a rope?" asked Danforth, as he looked at the young man's hands.

"No, but I can try. If I fall——" But the other cut him short, and flung the noose round his head, almost roughly.

"Now you're off," he urged, and the young fellow went over the sill. He was not heavy, but Danforth was out of training. His muscles strained, and his joints cracked as the rope paid out slowly. His eyes smarted, and once he had to take a hitch round the hook, and lean out for breath. Then he shut his eyes and lowered away, but his breath came fast and his head was dizzy.

Again the rope slackened. With a gasp Danforth sprang upon the sill and let himself over. He twisted his leg into the rope and swung off. He breathed more freely after he got away from the window, but the hemp grew hot under his hands, and he thought he must let go. But again his mind helped his muscles, and he still went down; down, past the second storey window, out of which the flames were darting; down, until he reached the arms that were reached up to him. There was a cheer from the sympathetic crowd that had gathered in the street.

Young Drummond caught him by the hand. "You have saved our lives," he said simply, "and I thank you. You are an old friend of my wife, I believe."

"Yes," put in Mrs. Drummond; "this is Mr. Danforth—and this is my husband, Mr. Francis Drummond; but how did you happen to come to us?"

Danforth rested for a moment to gain his senses.

"Easy enough to explain if one were to explain it," he said with an attempt at a laugh. "But you mustn't stand here. There's an hotel a little way round the corner; you had better go there. We can do no good for this place. It's done for. It isn't pleasant to lose one's clothes, but such things have to be borne."

Mrs. Drummond placed herself between the men, and took an arm of each. Thus they walked through the crowd of people, stopping now and then to look back at the burning building.

At the hotel steps Danforth paused. "I shall have to go back," he explained. "I have some things to look after. You had better go straight to bed. You can do nothing till morning. Then you can get another outfit. It's too bad—and a wedding journey, too!"

"But you will be here in the morning, will you not?" asked Drummond.

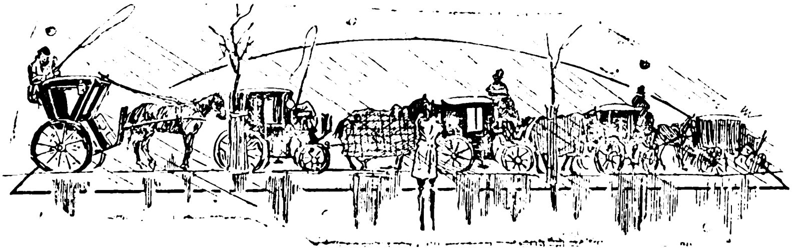
"Yes; we shall want to hear the whole story," said Mrs. Drummond. "Good-night," and she put out her hand. "I will thank you more in the morning," she added, as he touched it.

As they turned to go up the steps, Drummond felt a touch on his arm.

"I beg your pardon," said Danforth, handing him a small packet made up in a handkerchief; "I beg your pardon, but I think your wife must have forgotten her diamonds."

Then, before Drummond could speak, he turned and went back into the crowd.

F. M. Smith.



GOLDEN ✱ STAR.

- - A Romance - -

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

The prologue tells of the bridal of Vilcaroya and Golden Star, in the Sanctuary of the Sun in Cuzco, on the eve of the Spanish invasion and the fall of the Inca empire. It has been prophesied that when the sceptre of the Incas shall be grasped by the hand of one who has been dead, and is alive again, the ancient glories of their empire shall be restored. Golden Star, one of the sacred Virgins of the Sun, kneels at the foot of the altar and offers herself as the bride of him who will fulfil the prophecy. Vilcaroya swears for love of her to dare the ordeal. On the night of their bridal they are carried away to their secret resting place, and at the same time immense treasures are taken out of Cuzco, and hidden against the time of their awakening. Professor Martin Lamson brings back to England a unique mummy which he has found in a walled-in cave in a remote valley among the Cordilleras of the Peruvian Andes. A friend of his, Dr. Laurens Djama, a very clever physiologist, is present while he is unpacking it. He shows it to be entirely different from all other specimens of Inca embalming, and expresses the conviction that it might be possible to restore it to animation. The Professor consents to the experiment being made, and the mummy is removed to Djama's laboratory. In a week he sends for him and shows him his mummy alive and sleeping quietly in bed. The professor is so overcome by the sight that he falls fainting by the bedside.

BOOK I.

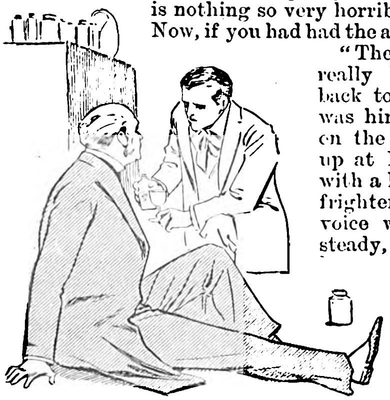
CHAPTER III.

The Waking of Vilcaroya.

When the Professor came to himself he was lying on the floor of the laboratory out of sight of the bed behind a great cupboard, glass doored and filled with bottles. Djama was kneeling beside him. A strong smell of ammonia dominated the other smells peculiar to a laboratory, and his brow was wet with the spirit that Djama was gently rubbing on it with his hand.

"What have I been doing?" he said, as with the other's assistance he got up into a sitting position and looked stupidly about him. "It isn't true, is it, that I really saw—Good God, no, it can't be; it's too horrible, I must have dreamt it."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow, nonsense. I should have thought you would have had better nerves than that. Come, take a nip of this, and pull yourself together. There is nothing so very horrible about it for you. Now, if you had had the actual work to do—"

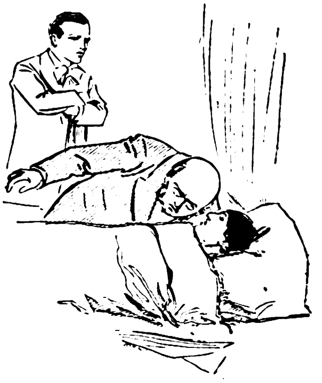


"I should have thought you would have had better nerves than that."

"Then it *is* true! You really have brought him back to life again. That was him that I saw lying on the bed." He looked up at Djama as he spoke with a half inquiring, half-frightened glance. His voice was weak and unsteady, like the voice of a man who has been stunned by some terrible shock, and is still dazed with the fear and wonder of it.

"Yes, of course it was," said Djama, "but I can tell you I should have hesitated before I had introduced you so suddenly if I hadn't thought that the nerves of an old traveller like you would have been a good deal stronger than they seem to be. It's a very good job that his Highness was only about half conscious himself when you collapsed, or you might have given him a shock that would have killed him again."

"Again?" said the Professor, echoing the last word as he got up slowly to his feet. "That sounds queer, doesn't it, to talk of killing a man again? I am more sorry than I can say, old man, that I was weak enough to let my feelings overcome me in such a ridiculous fashion. However, I am all right now. Give me another drain of that brandy of yours, and then let us talk. Is he still awake?"



Then the Inca's lips moved again.

"No, he dozed off again almost immediately, and you have been here about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. Do you think you can stand another look at him?"

"Oh, certainly," said the Professor, who, as a matter of fact, felt a trifle ashamed of himself and his weakness, and was anxious to do something that would restore his credit. He followed the Doctor out into the laboratory again, and stood with him for some moments without speaking by the Inca's bedside. He was sleeping very quietly, and his breathing seemed to be stronger and deeper than it had been. He had slightly shifted his position, and was lying now half turned on his right side, with his right cheek on the pillow.

"You see he has moved," whispered Djama. "That shows that muscular control has been re-established. We shall have him walking about in a day or so. Ah! he is dreaming, and of something pleasant, too. Look at his lips moving into a smile. Poor fellow, just fancy a man dreaming of things that happened three hundred years ago and waking up to find himself in another world. I'll be bound he is dreaming about his wife or sweetheart, and we shall have to tell him, or rather you will, that she has been a mummy for three centuries. Look now, his lips are moving; I believe he is going to say something. See if you can hear what it is."

The Professor stooped down and held his ear so close that he could feel on his cheek the gentle fanning of the breath that had been still for three centuries. Then the Inca's lips moved again, and a soft sighing sound came from them, and in the midst of it he caught the words:

"Cori-Coyllur Nustallipa, Nusta mi!"

Then there came a long, gentle sigh. The Inca's lips became still again, shaped into a very sweet and almost womanly smile, as though his vision had passed and left him in a happy dreamless slumber.

"What did he say?" whispered Djama. "Were you able to understand it?"

"Yes," said the Professor, "yes, and you were right about the subject of his dream. Come away, in case we wake him, and I will tell you."

They went to the other end of the laboratory, and the Professor went on, still speaking in a low half-whisper:

"Poor fellow, I am afraid we have incurred a terribly heavy debt to him. What he said meant, 'Golden Star, my princess, my darling,' so you see you were right, but poor Golden Star has been dead three hundred years and more, that is, at least, if his Golden Star is the same as the heroine of the tradition."

"What tradition?" asked Djama.

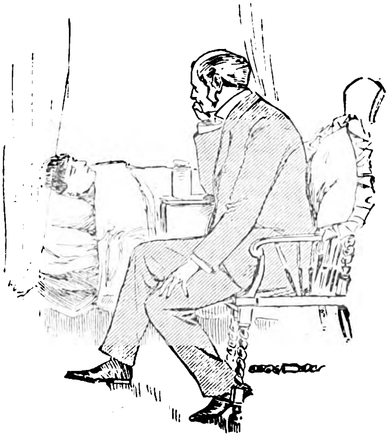
"It's too long a story to tell you now, but if she is the same, then our Inca's name is Vilcaroya, and he is the hero of the strangest story, and, thanks to you, the strangest fate, that the wildest romancer could imagine. However, the story must keep, for I wouldn't spoil it by cutting it short. The principal question now is, what are we going to do with him? We can't keep him here, of course?"

"No, certainly not," replied Djama, with knitted brows and faintly smiling lips. "His Highness must be cared for in accordance with his rank and our expectations. I shall have him taken into the house and properly nursed."

"But what about your sister; you will frighten her to death if you take in a living patient that has been dead for three hundred years?"

"Not if we manage it properly; there will be no need to tell Ruth the story yet, at any rate. I'll tell her that I am going to receive a patient who is suffering from a mysterious disease unknown to medical science. I'll say I picked him up in the Oriental Home in Whitechapel, and have brought him here to study him, and you and I must smuggle him into the house and put him to bed sometime when she is out of the way. Then I'll instal her as nurse; in fact, she will do that for herself; and as there is no chance of her learning anything from him, we can break the truth to her by degrees, and when His Highness is well enough to travel we'll all be off to Peru and come back millionaires, if you can only persuade him to tell you the secret of his treasure houses."

That night the Doctor and the Professor took turns in watching by the bedside of their strange patient, whose slumber became lighter and lighter until towards midnight he got so restless and apparently uneasy that Djama considered that the time had come to wake him and see if he was able to take any nourishment. So he set the Professor to work, warming some chicken broth over a spirit lamp, and mixing a little champagne and soda-water in one glass and brandy and water in another. Meanwhile he filled a hypodermic syringe with colourless fluid out of a little stoppered bottle, and then turned the sheet down and injected the contents of the syringe under the smooth bronze skin of the Inca's shoulder. He moved slightly at the prick of the needle, then he drew two or three deep breaths, and suddenly sat up in bed and stared about him with wide open eyes, full, as they well might be, of inquiring wonder.

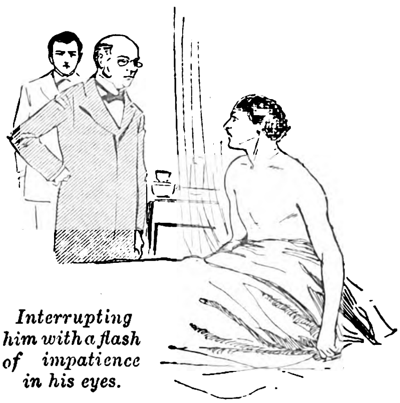


Took turns in watching by the bedside.

The Professor, who had turned at the sound of the hurried breathing, saw him as he raised himself, and heard him say in the clear and somewhat high-pitched tone of a dweller among the mountains:

"Has the morning dawned again for the Children of the Sun? Am I truly awake, or am I only dreaming that the death-sleep is over? Where is Golden Star, and where am I? Tell me, you who have doubtless brought me back to the life we forsook together — was it last night, or how many nights or moons ago?"

The words came slowly at first, like those of a man still on the borderland between sleep and waking; but each one was spoken more clearly and decisively than the one before it, and the last sentence was uttered in the strong, steady tones of a man in full possession of his faculties.



Interrupting him with a flash of impatience in his eyes.

"Come here, Lamson," said Djama a trifle nervously. "Bring the soup with you, and some brandy, though I don't think he needs it. Do you understand what he said?"

"Yes," replied the Professor, coming to the bedside with a cup of soup in one hand and a glass of brandy and water in the other. Both hands trembled as he set the cup and the glass down on a little table. He looked at the Inca like a man looking at a re-embodied spirit, and said to him in Quichua:

"I am not he who has brought you back to life, but my friend here, who is a great and skilled physician, and master of the arts of life and death. You are in his house, and safe, for we are friends, and have nursed you back to health and waking life after your long sleep."

"But Golden Star," said the Inca, interrupting him with a flash of impatiencein his eyes. "Where is she—my bride who went with me into the shades of death? Have you not brought her, too, back to life?"

The Professor stared in silence at the strange speaker of these strange words, which told him so plainly that the old legend of the death-bridal of Vilcaroya and Golden Star was now no legend at all, but a true story which had come down almost unchanged from generation to generation. Then an infinite pity filled his heart for this lonely wanderer from another age, whose friends and kindred had been dead and forgotten for centuries, and whose very nation was now only a name on a half-forgotten page of history.

"What does he say?" said Djama, breaking in upon his reverie. "I suppose he wants to know where he is, and what has become of that sweetheart of his he was dreaming about?"

"Yes," replied the Professor; "but you won't understand properly until I have told you the story. Poor fellow! I suppose we shall have to tell him the ghastly truth. Good Heavens! fancy telling a man that his wife has been dead for three hundred years or more! Look here, Djama, this business can't stop here, you know. What a fool I was, after all, not to see if there wasn't another chamber beside the one I found him in! Of course, there must be, and I have no doubt she is lying there at this present moment. We shall have to go and find her, and you must restore her as you have done him. Phew! where is it all going to end, I wonder!"

"And suppose we can't find her, or suppose I fail, even if I can bring myself to undertake that horrible work all over again," said Djama, looking almost fearfully at the Inca who was still sitting up in the bed glancing mutely from one to the other as though waiting for an answer to his question. Then, keeping his voice as steady as he could, the Professor told him the story of his resuscitation, addressing him by his own name and ending by asking him if he remembered when he and Golden Star had devoted themselves to die together, as the tradition said they had done.

"Yes, I remember," said Vilcaroya, with brightening eyes and faintly flushing cheeks. "How could I forget it? It was when the bearded strangers from the north had come and taken the usurper Atahuallpa prisoner in the midst of his conquering host at Cajamarca. It was after the Inca Huascar had been slain by stealth with a traitor's knife, it was on the night of the feast of Raymi when our Father the Sun had left the Sacred Fleece unkindled, and when was fulfilled the prophecy that the night should fall over the land of the Children of the Sun. Now, tell me, you who speak the language of my people, how long have I been sleeping?"

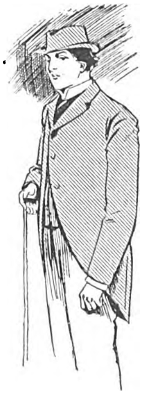
Instead of replying directly, he offered the Inca the cup of broth, and asked him first to take the nourishment that he must need so greatly after his long fast, telling him that it was needful to prevent him losing his new-found strength again. When he had eaten and drunk a little, then he would tell him what he could.

He took the broth and a little bread obediently, and while he was eating and drinking, the Professor translated what he had said to the Doctor. When he had finished, Djama looked at the Inca sitting there taking food and drink like any other human being, and with evident relish, too, and said:

"That happened in 1532, three hundred and sixty-three years ago! It sounds utterly incredible, doesn't it, and yet there he is, eating and drinking and talking with us just like any other man. I can hardly believe the work of my own hands, and I am beginning to half wish I had never begun it. Just imagine the awful loneliness to which we shall have condemned this poor fellow, supposing we can't find his Golden Star and restore her to him! Well, I suppose you had better tell him the truth at once. I think he can stand it. He has been a long time coming round, but I don't think there is much the matter with him now."

Then the Professor told Vilcaroya the, to him, so terrible truth that of all men in the world he was the most lonely, separated, as he was, from all that he had known and loved by an impassable gulf of nearly four long centuries—that his well-loved Golden Star was but a memory known to few, a name in a vague tradition; that the resting-place, even of her mummy, was unknown, and that all that the darkest prophecy could have foretold had in very truth fallen upon the land of the Incas and the Children of the Sun. Vilcaroya heard him to the end in silence, then, raising his hands to his forehead, he bowed his head and said:

"It is the will of our Father, foretold by the lips of his priests, but other things were foretold which shall be fulfilled as well as these. Golden Star is not dead, she only sleeps as I did. If I have awakened, why shall not she? I know where she lies; where Anda-Huillac swore to me they would lay her. Come, let us go, I will take you to the place, and you shall restore her to me warm and living and loving as she was when I kissed her good-bye in the Sanctuary of the Sun, and I will give you treasures of gold and silver and jewels such as you have never dreamed of in exchange for her."

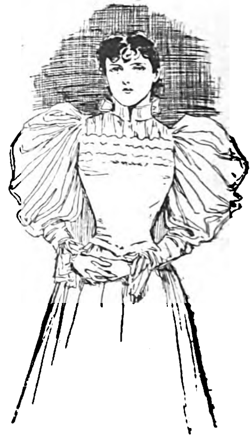


Dressed in English clothing.

CHAPTER IV.

In a New World.

Nearly four months had passed since the reanimation of the Inca Vilcaroya had been accomplished, and he was now installed as a regular patient in the house of the man to whom he owed his second life. It would, however, be more correct to speak of him as a guest rather than as a patient, for in all physical respects he was in perfect health. Mentally, too, his faculties seemed to have suffered little, if anything, from their long stagnation. He had, in fact, shown a quickness of intellect, and a strength and swiftness of observation and comprehension, and a degree of mental discipline, which astonished even the Professor himself, familiar and all as he was with all that there was to be known of the high intellectual development and complicated civilisation of the lost race to which he belonged.



The Doctor's sister, Ruth.

He had already made no small progress, not only in colloquial English under the Professor's guidance, but also in the meaning and use of the strange written and printed signs of which the people of this new world in which he had awakened made such wonderful use. Like a visitant from another world, he was surrounded by all the thickly crowding marvels of a civilisation as utterly different from his own as the possible civilisation of another planet might have been, and of these marvels he was never tired of hearing, listening with a grave interest blended with an almost child-like wonder to all that his new friends and teachers could tell him of the past that had gone by since the far-off night of his death-bridal with Golden Star, and of the wondrous present into which he had returned from the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

There he was, a man full grown, and, in a sense, highly educated, and even cultured, dressed in English clothing, and looking but little different from many of the thousands of the foreign citizens of London, and yet his life-memories were those of an Inca prince of the sixteenth century. He had stepped out of a highly developed and complex state of society which had ceased to exist for some three hundred years, and after a single stride, unconsciously taken, he was standing in the midst of that of the latter end of the nineteenth century.

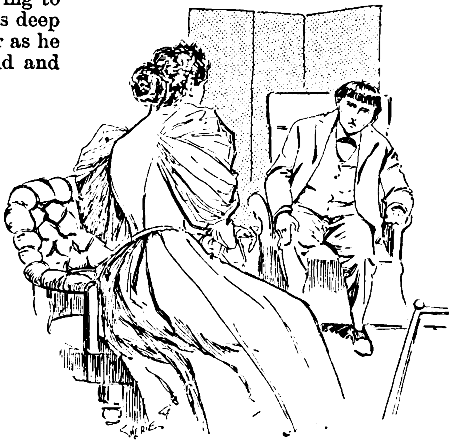
Only the wisdom and the jealous care of those who had undertaken the shaping of this new life of his saved him from the insanity which must almost inevitably have befallen the victim of so strange a caprice of fate under any other circumstances. Little by little they allowed him to become familiar with the marvels of his new world. First came description and then experience; walks in the less-frequented streets, and then in the busier ones; after that carriage drives in and about London.

He had, of course, never seen a horse or a dog, and his wonder at seeing a mounted rider for the first time was as great as that of his long dead fellow-countrymen when they saw Pizarro's troup of horse manœuvring in the great square of Cajamarca. Like them he believed horse and rider to be one animal until Djama had his own horse out and explained by demonstration the mysteries of horsemanship. Then, after due preparation, he was shown a railway train, a sight which tried his almost stoical self-control to the utmost. Then came a short journey, then a longer one, and after that he was shown the marvels of the Thames, with its shipping and steamers. Later on they took him on a steamboat voyage to Gravesend, and, lastly, on one across the Channel from London Bridge to Boulogne.

In all these excursions his constant companions were the Professor and the Doctor's sister, Ruth, who had gradually learned the marvellous story of their strange guest with a fearlessness that had not a little surprised both her brother and his friend.

She was a girl of but a little over twenty, slightly and yet gracefully shaped, with the active lissom grace of the Oriental subdued and yet strengthened by the strength she had inherited from her English mother. She had all her brother's dark Eastern beauty, yet softened and refined by the womanly grace whose perfection belongs only to the daughters of the Anglo-Saxon race.

A dreamer of strange dreams from her childhood, she had perhaps seen less of marvel in the coming of this lonely visitant from the past than either her brother or the Professor; and when she had been told, as she was one autumn night around the fire in the drawing-room, the story of the bridal of Vilcaroya and Golden Star, all her woman's heart went out to the strangely joined and strangely parted pair of lovers, one of whom was sitting by the fire beside her in that comfortable English drawing-room, listening as though he was striving to read the story with eager glances of his deep brown eyes on the lips of the Professor as he told it, while the other was lying cold and still in her death-sleep in a lonely cave among the wild mountains of Peru.


She assumed the rôle of his instructor.

And then Vilcaroya, in the slow and halting sentences of his new tongue, began to talk of the ancient glories of his dead race and the splendours of the vanished empire that he had seen in the height of its power, and foretold, in a voice that sounded strangely like prophecy, how he would some day restore those splendours, and reign with Golden Star on the throne of his ancestors.

As for him, he looked upon her with something that was very like worship. To him she seemed to belong to some superior order of beings, born and living in another world than his. When first he had heard her laugh he had listened like one who hears some divine music for the first time, and, like a child seeking a dearly-sought favour, he asked her to do it again, which, of course, provoked merrier music than before, and then he named her Cusi-Coyllur, or Joyful Star, after the royal maiden of his own people, daughter of the Inca Pachacutic, who loved the handsome rebel Ollantay, and waited for him in the Convent of the Virgins of the Sun until he came in triumph to claim her.

She accepted his silent homage with a gentle dignity that made the giving of it grow daily sweeter for him, and watched over him in all his comings and goings in the new world that was so strange to him, almost as a mother might have watched over the early efforts of her child's awakening intellect. And soon, when his fast growing command of English made conversation possible between them, she quietly and by common assent assumed the *rôle* of his instructor both at home and abroad. She taught him to read and write, showed him maps and tried to make him understand how the world had grown since his last lifetime, and told him the names of trees and flowers and all the familiar objects in the world that were so new to him. Then she took him shopping with her and showed him the use of money, and told him, perhaps not altogether wisely, of the tremendous power that belonged to men and women who could wield at will the golden sceptre to which nearly all men and women bowed down with willing homage.

And yet, despite all this intimacy and confidence, he never spoke of the lost treasures of the Incas, to which he alone of all living men possessed the key, save with an ever-guarded reserve which gave no clue to their hiding place. Ruth scrupulously abstained from any attempt to trespass on what she soon divined to be a secret sacred, at any rate, for the present, but once the Professor yielded to Djama's persuasion, and asked him point blank whether the treasures really existed, and, if so, where they were hidden. This was when he had been about a fortnight in the house. He looked him straight and steadily in the eyes, and said, with a smile that meant far more than his words:

"You and your friend the Great Magician have wakened me out of the death-sleep because you wished to do so. I am thankful to you, for you have, perchance, given me the power to fulfil the oath that I swore to our father, the Sun, and I have promised you that when Golden Star comes back to me from her grave I will give you gold and silver and jewels in plenty; but the key to our hidden treasures is in the tomb of Golden Star, and from her hand I must take it before I may give it to you. Tell your friend the Great Magician that, since he is the only one who has the power to do to her as he has done to me, and loosen the bond of death that binds her to the grave."

When the Professor told Djama of this he laughed, not altogether pleasantly, and said:

"I see, the English of that is that his Highness proposes to make a bargain with us—the price of a share of his treasures is the restoration of his Golden Star to life. Well, I suppose it is natural on his part, and after all it is perfectly fair, for in the nature of the case we couldn't ask him whether he wanted to be brought back into the world, and so, I suppose, it will have to be attempted, though I confess that after my experience with him, nothing but the hope of a very big fee would tempt me to do such work again.

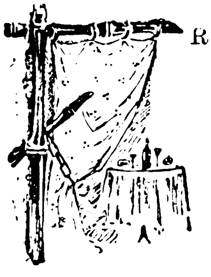
"And then—suppose I make the attempt and fail! As I said before, I shall have to do the work on the spot, and he'll have us there in the middle of that awful wilderness of mountains, and we may find that the Inca ideas of justice and fair play are not quite ours, and things may take an awkward turn. However, we must hope for the best. I'll do all I can, you may depend upon it, for there must be millions in the business if it can only be carried through."

Vilcaroya pursued the even tenor of his new life with wonderful patience and docility for nearly six months in London while preparations for the momentous journey were being made. He saw clearly the immense advantage that lay in learning everything that he could of the new world into which he had come before he entered upon the work of his new life; so he stifled his longing, and set himself untiringly to the study of his new conditions, grasping fresh ideas with wonderful quickness, and holding them with a tenacity that knew no forgetfulness, and so matters went on till at last all the arrangements were completed.

Djama had handed over his practice to a brother of the craft for a year, the Professor cancelled all his engagements, and postponed the writing of his great work on the Civilisation of the Incas till he possessed more reliable data. Ruth had with quiet persistence overcome every objection that had been raised against her making one of the party, and so at last the berths in the West Indian mail steamer were taken, and the day of departure finally fixed.

(To be continued.)

An Unexpected Reunion.



FRANK MILES sat in his bachelor chambers in Piccadilly, pretending to read; the examination which he was about to go up for was getting dangerously near, and he confessed to himself he had not latterly done so much reading as he ought to.

And even now, although his eyes mechanically rested on the words in the dry volume propped up before him, his thoughts were elsewhere, and after awhile he closed the book with a bang, and, puffing meditatively at his briar pipe, gave way to the pleasure of looking back.

Young men of twenty are not, as a rule, much given to retrospection; theirs is rather the pleasure of anticipation. The whole panorama of life, with its vast possibilities, lies before them, and they long to encounter them, rather than pass in reviewing the necessarily few boyish escapades through which they have already passed. Not that Frank Miles' retrospective reverie extended very far into his past; no more, in fact, than a brief two months; as it was exactly that period to a day since he had first seen the woman who was to exercise such an influence, although in a way he had little dreamed of at the time, on his future life.

There had been nothing romantic about the affair so far; it had simply been the infatuation of a young boy—or man perhaps would be more correct, in these go-ahead days when youngsters become men a good many years before their proper time as a rule.

His introduction to her had been quite in the ordinary course of events at a garden-party at Richmond, the hostess being a lady he had known from the time he had worn short frocks; and she had said in a matter of fact way: "Oh there's somebody here I want to introduce you to Frank, a Mrs. Lyle; her husband is in India and is coming home sometime this year, but as the climate did not suit his wife he sent her back in the spring. She is a most charming woman, and I am sure you will get on capitally together; ah, here she comes," as a stylishly dressed woman of about eight-and-twenty came towards them.

"I was just talking of you, my dear. This is my especial favourite, Frank Miles, who is supposed to be reading law, but I am afraid he is not so diligent as he ought to be."

The usual formal introduction followed, and as shyness was not one of Frank Miles' characteristics, in an incredibly short space of time he and Mrs. Lyle were on quite a friendly footing.

"Do you know," he said, "there's a jolly punt lying off the lawn? Do you care to go on the river?"

"It's the very thing I have been longing for all the afternoon; I should just love it."

Now, I am not prepared to say which is absolutely the very best place in the world for two young people to get on well with each other, but a Thames punt is not by any means the worst, and by the time they had finished their aquatic excursion Mrs. Lyle and Frank Miles had become sworn friends.

There was something irresistibly fresh and attractive to her about the good-looking, happy dispositioned lad, who was, on his part, evidently impressed with her good looks, and the result was they ran across each other pretty frequently during the next few weeks.

The lady was installed in a charming little flat in the West-end, and by virtue of her position as a married woman she was in a position herself to play the part of hostess to him, and this she had not scrupled to do.

The reverie in which he was indulging at the time this story opens was suddenly interrupted by the advent of a visitor in the shape of an extremely well-dressed young man, who came into the room without troubling to be announced, and threw himself down into an easy chair with the air of an intimate acquaintance.

"Day-dreaming again, you lazy beggar. I don't suppose you have touched a book this morning."

"Then you're altogether wrong for once; I was reading hard up to ten minutes ago."

"Well, then, you don't want to do any more to-day. Will you come with me to the Lyric to-night? I've got a box."

"To-night; let me see—yes, I've got nothing on."

"That's right, and we ought to have a jolly evening. By the way, Frank, you won't mind what I'm going to say, old man?"

"Not a bit; fire away."

"Well, do you know people are beginning to talk about you and the grass widow? I was at the club just now, and——"

"It really does not interest me what they say at the club, and I prefer not to discuss the matter further, if you don't mind."

"Right you are. I shall come here to-night and pick you up. Good-bye till then," and Charlie Sinclair took his departure.

"Now, then, for one or two hours' sound work," said Frank Miles with determination, as he settled down to the table and again propped the book in front of him. But the fates were against him; a knock at the door brought another interruption.

"A messenger boy has just brought this letter, and wants to know if there is an answer, sir."

The book got knocked over somehow, and he opened the envelope with a pleasant smile on his face. The letter it contained was brief but to the point: "My Dear Boy. What have I done to be so neglected? I haven't seen anything of you for three whole days; come and see me this evening; I have something very startling to tell you, so don't say you are engaged.—Very sincerely yours, Helen Lyle."

The gentleman's reply was equally laconic: "Dear Mrs. Lyle, I have been awfully busy reading, but I have a spare evening to-day, and will most certainly come, Yours very sincerely, F. Miles."

A few hours after a hansom deposited him at the door of the Empress Mansions, where, judging by the friendly, albeit respectful salutation of the doorkeeper, his face was not altogether unknown.

"Mrs. Lyle will be with you in a minute or two, sir," said the trim parlour-maid, ushering him into the well-known drawing-room, and closing the door as she spoke.

He looked round, as if half-expecting to see some change in the surroundings; but everything was as usual—as he knew it, in fact. And it was an undeniably pretty room, fit to contain, he thought to himself, her to whom it belonged, as he took a casual glance in the mirror to see that his tie was straight.

"Vanity, thy name is——"

"Woman, my dear Mrs. Lyle," he hastily interposed, coming forward to meet her, and, having secured her hand, holding it somewhat longer than was absolutely necessary, perhaps.

"Do you know you are looking awfully pretty to-night?"

"Thank you kindly, sir," she said, making him a demure courtesy; "and now please tell me why you haven't been to see poor me for three whole days."

"I have been awfully busy—reading, you know—and—and——"

"And what, pray?" with a mischievous smile.

"Well, I am afraid, you know, I am getting too fond of being in your society; they say people are beginning to talk."

"Talk, indeed, and what have they to talk about? I am older, ever so much older, than you, you know."

"Oh, Helen."

"Yes, I am, quite five years, and I am married, you know"—with dignity—"and that's why I wanted to see you to-night. My husband," the boy winced perceptibly, but she did not appear to notice it, and continued, "is coming home almost directly; he may be here to-morrow, even."

"To-morrow," he gasped out, "then this must be our last evening together."

"You silly boy, what difference can it make. I shall introduce you to my husband, and you will be the best of friends, I hope. But I must give up calling you Frank, for his name is Frank, too."

"And I suppose I must drop the Helen;" with a sigh.

"Well, the name perhaps, but not the personality. Do you know you promised me one of your photos, and you have never given me one—you must have some taken at once. No! no! not now; I don't mean that," as he half got up.

"I had some taken the other day, and I have them in my pocket now, I think," going towards his overcoat.

"And did you get all those done for me, or for who?" she asked mischievously.

"Well, partly for you, and partly for someone else."

"And who is she?"

"It is not a she at all; it is for my father."

"Your father! Bless the boy, I didn't know you had one; you never mentioned him. Is he here in town?"

"No, but he soon will be; and, do you know, I have never seen him?"

"Never seen your father! What do you mean?"

"Well, the fact is, my mother died when I was quite a baby; and my father went away, nobody knew where, and a sister of my mother's brought me up—and in her own name, too: so that until two months ago I didn't even know my own name. I have always been Frank Miles, and Frank Miles I shall continue," he said defiantly.

"How truly romantic; but has your father written to you, and explained his long silence?"

"No, he hasn't; but it seems he has been making me a handsome allowance all the time; and now he has written to his lawyers, who in turn have written to me, for a photo of myself, to send him through them, and I sent them one to-day; and now I am waiting to be claimed—identified, in fact, like they do the Johnnies at Scotland Yard."

"And you don't know——"

"I don't know anything more than I have told you."

"My poor boy, I am sorry for you!"

"Oh, Helen, it isn't that I mind; it is the losing you. I didn't know until to-night how much you were to me, and now it must all come to an end! If you had only been free!"

"But, you see, I am not, dear; and now do you know I have a story to tell you?

"When I married my husband, three years ago now, out in India, he told me that there was a secret connected with his life which he ought to have told me before we were married; but he put it off, and put it off, until I was just sailing for England, and then he said he would tell me when he came home for good, to settle down in the old country for the rest of his life. And now he is really coming, I feel a dread of what it may be. Oh, Frank, Frank, if ever you get married, and I hope you may some day, to some really nice girl, don't ever keep anything from her—promise me, promise me."

"I would promise you anything, dearest, and seal it too, if only I dared!"

Their two heads were remarkably close to each other, and it is impossible to say what might not have happened, had not the door suddenly opened and a man hastily entered.

"Well, little woman, here I am at last."

With a half hysterical cry, Mrs. Lyle rushed frantically forward, and fell into the arms of a tall, bearded man.

"Is it really you, dear? I didn't expect you till to-morrow."

"Well, here I am, pet; the boat got in earlier than I expected, and I only just stopped to call at my lawyer's before I came on; what a miserable light this is," turning up the lamp. "Hallo! I didn't see you weren't alone."

"This is a very dear young friend of mine—Mr. Frank Miles; this is my husband, Frank, you have so often heard me talk about."

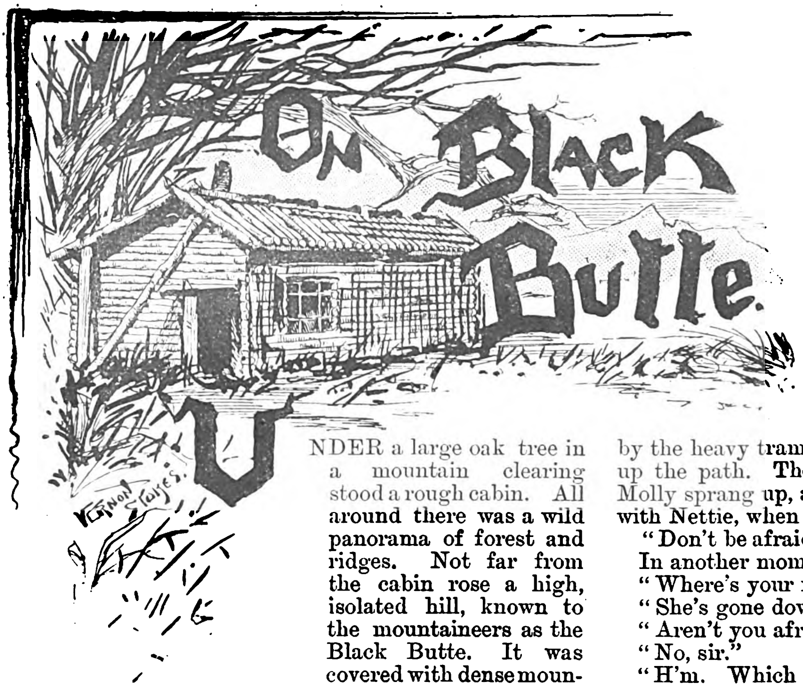
The young man came forward with a somewhat flushed face, prepared to make the usual conventional greeting.

"Good Heavens! why it must be"—taking a photograph from his pocket—and then, to Frank Miles' intense surprise, kissing him fervently on the cheek.

"You know, Helen, I always told you I had something to confess. Well, this is it"—looking proudly at the dumfounded boy—"and nothing to be ashamed of either."

Explanations followed, and in the excitement of parental affection the elderly man fortunately failed to note the discomfiture of the other two personages in the little domestic comedy—or tragedy—which was it?

S. J. F. Newbery.



UNDER a large oak tree in a mountain clearing stood a rough cabin. All around there was a wild panorama of forest and ridges. Not far from the cabin rose a high, isolated hill, known to the mountaineers as the Black Butte. It was covered with dense mountain grass, out of which cropped many ledges of sandstone-like islands.

In this rude dwelling lived Mrs. Dargan and her two children. Molly, twelve years of age, and Nettie, a very pretty child of five, with big blue eyes and long white curls. She was the idol of her mother and sister.

There was a son also, a fine lad of sixteen, but he was working manfully in the sawmill down in the cañon, whose dull drone could be heard when the wind was right, and whose shrill whistle marked the time for the little family on the mountain.

Mr. Dargan, who was a turbulent, dissipated man, had abandoned his family, and nothing had been heard of him for three or four years. It was better for them, the mountain people said.

Mrs. Dargan held the quarter-section of Government land that her husband had staked out as his claim during a "gold rush," and she and her two elder children were working hard to accumulate money enough to pay the few shillings per acre required by the Government, and secure their patent or title. In pursuance of this object, Mrs. Dargan often left Molly and little Nettie at home while she went down to the mill-village to do washing for people there.

The summer had opened very hot. The sandstone ridges seemed to quiver under the blazing sun. The grass dried up; the open hills turned brown. From behind McLaughlin's Ridge, which loomed like a wall against the sky, rolled dense volumes of smoke from forest fires. This settled into the cañon, making everything hazy and indistinct.

One morning Molly and Nettie went out and picked a pailful of wild blackberries, returning to the cool shelter of the cabin when the sun became hot. A portion of the fruit they ate for their lunch, with a spare allowance of sugar, and plenty of cream furnished by faithful Peggy, the cow, who found her living on the neighbouring hills.

Mrs. Dargan intended going to the mill the next day, and, which was unusual, remaining over night, as she had two days' work promised her. So she made a pie with the remaining berries, and set it away in a little cool safe, which was fastened on the shady side of the big oak tree, in order that the children might have a rare dainty to console them during her absence.

Early next morning she set out for the mill, three miles distant. Molly busied herself about the house, and talked to Nettie with an important and motherly air. She felt no fear at being left in charge in the daytime, but her heart sank a little as she thought of the coming night.

About noon she was sitting in the little porch while Nettie played with her doll, when she was startled by the heavy tramp of horses. Four men came riding up the path. They carried rifles across their saddles. Molly sprang up, and was about to retreat into the cabin with Nettie, when the leader called out:

"Don't be afraid, sis. We won't hurt you."

In another moment they drew up before the door.

"Where's your mother?" asked the leader.

"She's gone down to the mill, sir," replied Molly.

"Aren't you afraid to stay here alone?"

"No, sir."

"H'm. Which way did the man go who passed here this morning?"

"I didn't see anyone pass this morning."

"Have you seen a strange man about here lately—a lame man with a long black beard?"

"No, sir."

The men consulted together in low tones. Then the leader turned to Molly with a pleasant smile, and said:

"Well, sis, keep a sharp look-out for that fellow. He's a bad man, and the officers want him. He was shot in the leg when he escaped, and you'll know him by his limp. Catch him for us, and we'll pay you a handsome reward. Good-bye."

The men laughed and rode away, leaving Molly greatly alarmed at their startling words. The thought of a desperate criminal at large in her vicinity was terrifying. She hurried into the house with Nettie and bolted the door.

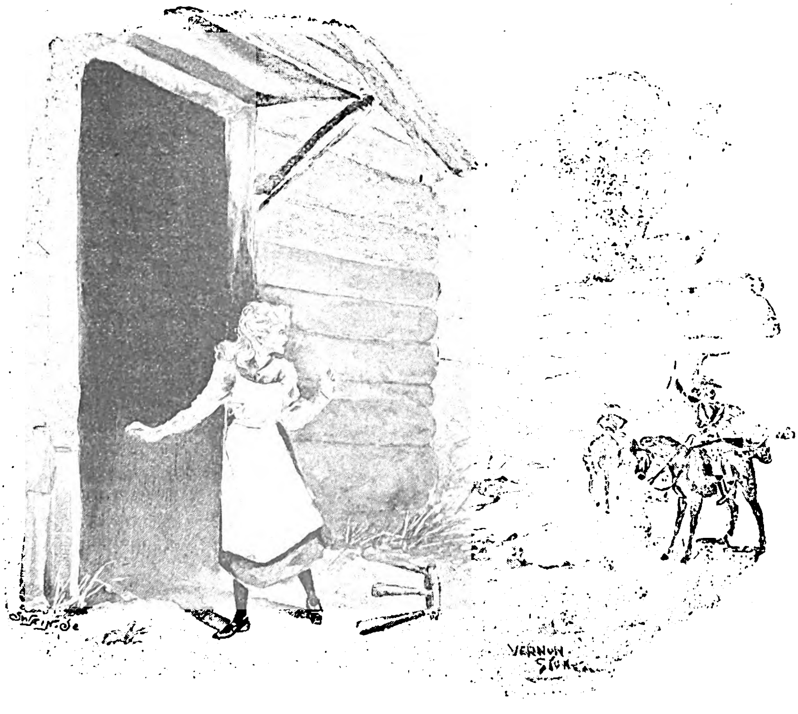
Towards evening she ventured out, fearfully, when a gentle lowing told her that Peggy had come up to be milked and receive her usual handful of bran. With frightened eyes she glanced at the darkening woods and hills, but saw nothing to justify her alarm; yet she breathed more freely when she was again safely behind her bolted door. In her apprehension she even forgot the blackberry pie.

She built a fire in the fireplace, for the Californian nights are cool, even in midsummer, and spent the evening singing to Nettie and telling her stories. There was no light in the cabin except the fire, for oil was expensive.

In the middle of a story Molly was startled by a strange flash of light, which swiftly traversed the opposite wall and vanished. For a moment her heart seemed to leap into her throat, and she was overcome by fear. Then she realised that the light came from the outside, and had flashed through the window. Swiftly, without noise, she placed Nettie in a corner, warning her to keep still because someone was coming; then she scattered the brands in the fireplace, and threw ashes on them.

She crept to the window and looked out. A strange beam of light cut athwart the darkness and flashed weirdly over trees and bushes, then wheeled and darted through the window again with a blinding glare. Molly dropped to the floor and listened.

She heard slow, cautious footsteps approaching. They were irregular, like the steps of a man who limps. They came nearer and reached the porch. A gleam of light poured through the crack under the door, and as suddenly vanished. The strange visitor evidently carried a dark lantern. Then there was a heavy knock. Molly did not answer, and presently the latch rattled and the door creaked under a heavy pressure.



Molly sprang up.

"Who's there?" called Molly, in a tone of fright.

"Is your mother at home?" growled a hoarse voice.

"What do you want?" gasped Molly, still more frightened. Nettie began to cry, and Molly hastened to her corner and tried to sooth her.

"Who's that crying?" asked the gruff voice.

"It's my little sister. You've frightened her half to death. Please go away," replied Molly, with a bravery that surprised herself.

"Open the door and give me something to eat. Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you," said the man a little less fiercely.

"I can't open the door," faltered Molly. Then a happy thought came to her. "There's a pie in the safe by the oak tree," she cried. "You can take that. It's the best we've got."

The man hesitated a little and muttered to himself, and then she heard him limp away towards the safe. For a few minutes there were indistinct sounds, and an occasional ghostly flash of light. Then everything was still.

Molly sat all night holding the sleeping Nettie and watching in darkness and profound silence; and she murmured a heartfelt thanksgiving when the first light of dawn brightened the window.

She waited till the sun was high before venturing out. She judged that the man would be hidden in some secure place during the day. But she had not recovered from her fright. She resolved to drive up Peggy and milk her, and then take Nettie and go down to the mill. She noticed that the safe was open and the pie was gone.

Nettie seemed to have forgotten her fright of the previous evening, and was in high spirits. Molly gave her Rosy, the doll, to play with, and bade her sit in the porch while she went after the cow.

With flying feet Molly traversed the path across the bushy ravine, and hastened breathlessly up the grassy ridge. She soon found Peggy, and drove her home at a speed that astonished the worthy cow. She then hurried to the cabin for the milk-pail, and there a terrible discovery burst upon her. The doll lay in the porch, and Nettie was gone. She rushed frantically hither and thither, shouting Nettie's name, but the child had vanished as if the earth had swallowed her up. For some time she continued the search, crying bitterly, and wildly calling, but without avail.

Then an idea occurred to her. Perhaps Nettie, eager to see her mother, had started along down the path to the mill. Inspired with new hope, she hurried in pursuit; but as turn after turn in the path was passed, and no bright head with white curls appeared, hope drooped in her heart and a horrible fear took its place. It now seemed certain to her that Nettie had been stolen away by their dreadful visitor of the previous night. So she flew on in search of help.

Soon after Molly left the cabin, the four horsemen with rifles came slowly round the base of the Black Butte. They were evidently following the trail.

"He was here last night or this morning, sure," said the sheriff. "I think he's hid on the Black Butte somewhere."

"If he's hid on the Black Butte we won't get him in a hurry," grumbled one of the men. "It's the thickest place in the county."

They followed the trail to the cabin, which they found deserted. The men looked uneasy, and examined the entire place eagerly and keenly.

"I hope he hasn't hurt the kids," muttered the grumbler. "We most orter took 'em down to the mill yesterday."

They soon took up the path again, which led along the base of the Butte, and finally disappeared in the dense thickets that covered the hill.

"He's hid on Black Butte, boys," declared the sheriff, "and we've got him."

"Ain't you a little too fast?" expostulated the grumbler. "He's got us just as much as we've got him. He won't come out, and it's no good to crawl into that brush after him."

"We'll make him come out," remarked the sheriff coolly, as he dismounted and stirred with his foot the thick carpet of dead leaves that covered the ground. "You and Tom ride round to the other side of the Butte and take positions where you can put him up when he leaves cover. Then Jack and I will set fire along the edge of the brush half-way around. The wind is right, and it'll take the fire over the hill in half an hour, and it won't do much damage beyond."

The two men rode away, and after some time had elapsed, a rifle shot announced that they had reached their stations. The sheriff and his companion then lit torches and began setting fire to the bushes along the bottom hill.

The flames caught the dry leaves like tinder, and spread swiftly and fiercely; then they leapt into the brush and flared up with a sharp and startling sound. Then the wind sprang up, and fiery red serpents darted roaring up the hill, their breath turning everything to flame. The bushes were transfigured for an instant, then they shrivelled up and vanished in the hot whirlwind.

The two men stood together and gazed upon the monster they had unchained. Suddenly the sheriff started and cried out:

"Did you hear anything, Jack?"

"No; what was it?"

"I thought I heard a child crying up there on the hill," gasped the sheriff, as pale as death.

"Oh, no; 'twas only the hissing of the green bush in the fire, I guess," replied Jack, a little startled.

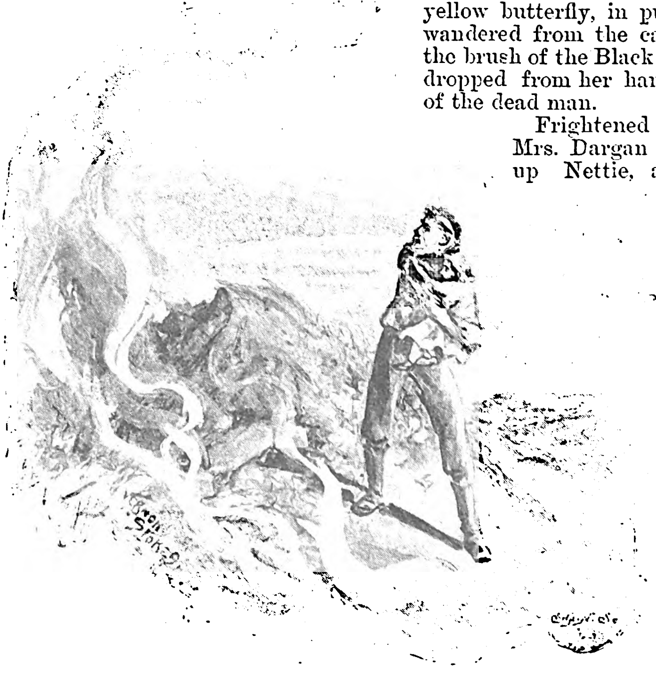
The lower portion of the Butte was now a roaring mass of flames, darting, soaring, and licking up everything with terrific energy. A low redwood tree stood on the hill. The fire seized it, and went leaping zig-zag to the top, like a red and yellow acrobat, howling in triumph and flinging out banners of flame from the topmost boughs.

The sheriff was still nervous and only half reassured.

"I wouldn't have started it if I'd known 'twould burn so fierce," he muttered.

Suddenly Jack uttered a yell and pointed upward. A tall, black-bearded man was hastily limping across a rocky opening on the side of the hill. He turned as he heard the shout, and shook his fist at the two men with a gesture of rage and defiance. Then he halted, came back a few steps, and remained a moment gazing earnestly down the hill.

And then the sheriff and Jack saw a terrible sight. On a ledge of sandrock, which rose up only a little in advance of the fire, stood a pretty little child, with long, white curls flying in the heated wind. Sometimes the smoke hid her. She was gazing at the frightful scene before her and screaming with terror.



The fire was lapping the rock.

"Oh, God," cried the sheriff in a tone of intense agony.

The officers were brave men. They ran along the edge of the fire, through beds of glowing coals and amongst the blazing grass, seeking for a place to rush through and save the child. Their boots shrivelled up and scorched their feet, their clothes smoked and burnt, and they recoiled half suffocated. They saw that though they might charge through the flames and reach the child, it would only be to die with her. They could never return.

They turned their despairing eyes once more towards the poor babe. The smoke rolled away, and both uttered a frantic shout of joy. The black-bearded fugitive stood on the rock beside the child. He was stripping off his outer garments and carefully wrapping her in them. Then he lifted her in his arms and stood for a moment calmly choosing his way of escape.

The fire was lapping the rock. It was sweeping by on both sides and rushing up the steep hillside. The man saw that it would be impossible to escape in that direction. He would be overtaken and destroyed. He sprang down from the ledge and disappeared.

The merciless flames swept on. In a moment the two men below saw him rushing down from the fiery ring, his precious burden clutched closely to his breast, his face pressed against her, running, stumbling, falling, crawling, rising again and staggering on. With one impulse they dashed in to help him. As he drew near, reeling dizzily, they seized him, and half led, half dragged him out of that fierce furnace to the cool ground beyond, where he dropped and fell lifeless.

They extinguished his burning clothing, and tore the blazing wrappings from the child whose life he had saved. They brought water and tried to revive him, but he had inhaled the flames, and never breathed again.

As they lifted the crying child they saw that she still held in her fingers a large black-and-yellow butterfly, in pursuit of which she had wandered from the cabin and become lost in the brush of the Black Butte. The gaudy insect dropped from her hand and fell on the breast of the dead man.

Frightened voices were heard, and Mrs. Dargan rushed forward, caught up Nettie, and hugged her close, kissing and soothing her.

"Where did you find her?" she panted. "How thankful I am."

"Do not thank us," he said solemnly. "There lies the man who lost his life in saving her."

Mrs. Dargan looked and started forward. Then she turned to the sheriff with a pale look of touching dignity, and said:

"He is my husband."

She turned to the dead again, and put her hand to her eyes. They saw tears trickling through her fingers.

C. E. B.

A LION'S FEAST

WE had our camp at the big bend of the Zonga River, where it approaches nearest the great desert of the Hottentot country, and one morning word was brought in that we had captured a very large lion in a pit which had been dug for that purpose. Among the natives who went out in advance of us were two fellows who had been threatening each other with personal violence ever since we left the Vaal River. Both were tall, strong men, and each had his following, as is always the case, even in civilised communities.

They had been restrained only by threats of the Colonel to turn them out of camp. They met at the lion pit, and by accident or otherwise one jostled the other. It was the spark leading to an explosion. Tom-Tom, as we had nicknamed one of them, seized the other, whose title was Joe-Joe, and with a twist and a wrench threw him into the pit upon the lion. It was a terrible thing to do, and neither the Colonel nor I believed that Tom-Tom really meant to do it, though he would not have hesitated to use hatchet or knife.

We met the natives coming back with the murderer in custody, and they demanded that his life should pay the forfeit. The pair of us ran on to the pit in hopes to save Joe-Joe, but we were too late. The lion was not hungry, but in a terrible temper over his capture, and he had killed the man as soon as he could get to him. Had the victim lost his life in a fair fight, nothing would have been done. Had he been stabbed to death in camp, the murderer would have to give his widow, or other relatives, about half-a-crown's worth of beads. As it was, the men would hear of no punishment short of death.

About ten o'clock in the forenoon, having exhausted every effort, and the men beginning to threaten loudly, we turned Tom-Tom over to them. He had been very quiet all the morning, and when told that he must die he exhibited no emotion. He was in his prime, and had a wife and three children at home, but he was too brave and proud-spirited to break down. He had a choice of death—that is, they would strip him and leave him bound hand and foot on an ant hill, or he should be flung to the lion, who had, by that time, eaten the last morsel of poor Joe-Joe. He would rather have been shot or clubbed, but they thought that would be getting off too easily. After thinking it over for a while, he said to us:

"I have seen men left to the ants, and it was sometimes a whole day before they died. If I am thrown into the pit the lion will kill me within a minute, and there will be no suffering. And, too, the man who is killed by the lion dies a proud death, and his wife and children need not be ashamed to say how he died. Yes, I will die that way. The lion will not be hungry again before to-morrow, but I wish the men to annoy him until he raves with anger. Then he will finish me at once, and you can get the cage and secure him."

Tom-Tom talked the matter over as calmly as if speaking of an ox gone astray. We saddled up and rode away. What followed was told to us on our return. A portion of the natives armed themselves with long poles and sticks and stones and angered the lion until he was positively furious. Tom-Tom was then led forward. All agreed that he was the least excited of the crowd. Two strong fellows had been appointed to fling him into the pit, but when he was brought forward he said:

"I am to die for causing the death of a man who thirsted for my life. I do not complain of that, but I wish to die like a man. Unbind me and stand back. I know what a lion can do. He can kill an ox with a blow of his paw, and he can crush the largest bone at one bite. He will kill me before you can count twenty, but he would afterwards be ashamed that he had killed a man who was helpless. Jab him with your poles and make him furious. That's the way! Hear his cries of rage! See how he leaps up in hopes to get out! You are now going to see a brave man die. Look sharply, for you will never see the like again. When you return home you will tell everybody that I threw Joe-Joe to the lion, but you will also say that I was killed by the same beast. Now I'm going; good-bye all."

He stepped to the edge of the pit, which was about twelve feet deep, and dived head first down upon the lion, who was standing on his hind feet. There was a fierce roar, muffled growls, a struggle lasting a few seconds, and the men looked down and knew that Tom-Tom was dead.

The lion was so thoroughly aroused that it was not until the next day we could make a move to cage him, and it took us over half a day to bring him out of the pit and make him a secure prisoner. After he was out of the pit I looked into it, but there was very little to be found to tell of the double tragedy. Then I closely inspected the caged beast, but he had licked himself clean, and was hungry for another victim.

E. C. Waggener.

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THE WOMAN OF THE WINDMILL.

It was a pretty little windmill, with its big round tower capped by a weather vane, its long arms or blades which rattled in the west wind like the sails of a boat in stays, and its little round windows looking over the hills of Anjou like the telescopes of an astronomer—such was the windmill of Bernardeau; and when it was working, all the windmills of the neighbourhood looked like white seagulls pursued by a bird of prey.

It was situated on the slope of the Guigne, at the end of a little crooked pathway hardly wide enough for the mill donkey, and in which one might search in vain for traces of human footprints, because it was so dark under its vault of shrubbery, so muddy and rugged, that the woman of the mill always took to the vines when on her way to Ancenis on foot.

And a handsome woman, too, was this lady of the mill. She was twenty-five years old, and with a well rounded form, a little hand, flashing dark eyes, and lips as red as wild cherries. She was smart in her attire, and there was little in her appearance to reveal the fact that she was a widow. When she came into the village, mounted upon the donkey that carried her bags of flour, all the young fellows came out to admire her fine figure and the beautiful ankles which appeared below her short skirt.

Even the donkey himself seemed proud of his mistress. He travelled along at an easy gait, tossing his head and cocking his ears, as if to say to everybody: "Here she is, you have only to look at her; this is La Meunière du Bernardeau. There isn't another woman like her in all the country!"

And that was the truth. But she was the subject of a great deal of gossip. How the tongues did wag on her account. It was said that since the death of her husband, a poor goose of a fellow who had taken her without a penny from a farm and left her all his property, she frequently tossed her cap over the blades of her windmill. Whether this was true or not, the blades certainly never told; but one thing is certain, and that is that she did hang up her cap there publicly on one occasion, and it cost her her life. Here is her story:

The first thing the Vendéens did when they rose in revolt against the Republic was to make use of the windmills. Nothing could be better suited for signalling or more troublesome for the enemy. Where the Blues could only see white wings turning round in a melancholy fashion, the Chouans possessed a perfect telegraphic system, which told them of the movements of the Republican army.

The windmill of Bernardeau was one of the principal vedettes on the Loire. Three days before the attack upon Nantes, Cathelineau came to the mill of Bernardeau and asked for shelter. It was the 22nd of June, 1793: Bonchamp had been at Athens since the 17th awaiting the main body of the army. The weather was magnificent, and the Vendéens camped in the open air. When Cathelineau at the end of a little road found himself face to face with the beautiful woman of the mill, he asked her if she was a Royalist.

"One might easily become a Royalist to serve under so handsome an officer as you," said she.

"Good enough! Then let me have shelter here to-night."

La Meunière cheerfully welcomed him, and Cathelineau slept that night in the mill. The next morning, when he was leaving, she sent to him from the threshold of the mill a perfect volley of kisses, after which she went up to the highest window in the mill and waved her little white handkerchief.

Eight days afterwards Cathelineau, mortally wounded, was coming from Ancenis in a carriage, and as he passed by the mill he cast a long and sad look at it. According to the order, its blades were arranged so as to announce the approach of the soldiers of Canclaux.

From the 17th of October to the 17th of December, during the sixty days which separated the two retreats of the Vendéen army on the Loire, the mill of Bernardeau continued its signals of intelligence with those of La Vendée. But the 17th of December was its last day.

Harassed by the Mayençais, that crushed them at the Battle of Mans, the Vendéens reached Ancenis and endeavoured to cross the Loire; but for want of sufficient rafts, a considerable number of them were obliged to abandon the effort and to advance through the country, in the hope of escaping the enemy.

At sight of this old mill, which they immediately recognised as an ally, about twenty men took refuge in it just at the moment when Westermann came to the heights of Bel Air.

Suddenly a puff of blue smoke rolled from one of the upper windows of the mill. La Meunière herself commenced the fight.

"Good shot!" she said; "there is one less now."

Westermann ordered a company of hussars to surround the old mill. He was in too great a hurry to finish with La Rochejacquelin to bother himself with windmills. The hussars had hardly arrived at the mill before his flying artillery began to cannonade the few rafts of the Chouans who were endeavouring to cross the Loire. The officer who was in command of the company summoned the occupants of the mill to surrender.

La Meunière opened a little window, fastened her lace cap on the point of one of the blades, and shouted out:

"Come and get it, you ill-shaped puppy!"

A volley from the hussars was the only answer to these insolent words. The window-panes were broken to fragments. The Vendéens inside returned the fire, and dropped five of the horsemen. The company then dismounted, and rushed against the door of the mill, which they broke with the butts of their guns.

"Surrender, you scoundrels, or in a few moments you'll all be dead!" shouted the officer.

"You are the scoundrels!" yelled the woman of the mill. "Let me see if you are able to get my cap."

The hussars entered the lower storey, but the ladder was removed by the Vendéens, who now fired upon them from the storey above, and made terrible ravages in their ranks.

The woman of the mill busied herself with the work of loading the guns, a task which she performed with astonishing rapidity. The Chouans, sheltered behind the flour sacks, cared little for the fire of the Blues.

"Take good aim!" cried La Meunière; "don't let a single one escape."

The officer, seeing his men falling all round him, ordered them to come out and take the place by storm, scaling the arms of the mill. It was a magnificent assault. Twenty hussars clambered up the blades. With their carbines thrown across their backs, they clambered up like sailors to the storey above, and from there fell either killed or wounded under the balls or the bayonet thrusts of the Vendéens. One brigadier managed to get up to the roof by making a rampart of the bodies of his comrades, who held on to the arms like drowning men to planks.

"We are all right, my friends!" cried he. "Guard well the entrance of the mill!" After planting the colours of the company on the weather-vane, be bored a hole in the roof to admit the barrel of his gun. Three times he fired, and mortally wounded three men. This threw the besieged into a panic; resistance was becoming impossible, and the Vendéens were already raising the butts of their guns in the air, when La Meunière pushed down the ladder and cut off their retreat. "Now die like men!" she shouted. Then there commenced a perfect massacre. Attacked above and below, the Vendéens fought like imprisoned lions. When the ammunition was exhausted, they threw down the sacks of corn and flour, and, clubbing their muskets, jumped down among the Blues, who received them on the points of their bayonets. It was a horrible spectacle.

"Where is La Meunière?" shouted the hussars.

"Here she is, citizens," said she, as she let herself slip along the shaft of the mill. "I have given you no quarter, and I don't want any mercy from fellows like you."

"All right," said the officer. "We'll settle your account in short order. Place yourself against that wall."

There was something singularly graceful and proud in her bearing, and a glance of withering contempt in her eye as she advanced towards the wall. Her splendid black hair was now floating in disorder upon her shoulders. She gathered it modestly around her breast. Then she stood against the wall.

"Now, scum of the earth, fire!" said she.

This piece of feminine boldness made the officer hesitate. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Twenty-five."

"Your name?"

"I am La Meunière du Bernardeau."

"Do you want to live?"

"No, I'd rather die than receive mercy from you."

"Come now, simply shout 'Long live the Republic,' and I'll let you go free."

"Long live the King!" she cried in a vibrating voice.

A moment afterwards there was the rolling sound of a volley. That was the last of La Meunière du Bernardeau.

"She was a plucky piece of flesh, all the same," said the soldiers.

Westermann's hussars lost in that attack twenty-two men and eight wounded.

Since then the mill has remained abandoned as if it were cursed. Open to all the winds of heaven, without a roof, without arms, it stands. Occasionally a tramp passing through the country takes shelter there, and sleeps with the swallows and the bats. Following its well-known habit, the ivy, which seems to be in love with ruins, gradually entwined itself round it, and from a distance the uncrowned tower has the aspect of a ruined fortress.

J. P. L.

AN INCIDENT OF THE MUTINY.

SERGEANT DONALD MACFARLANE was one of the soldiers to whom it had been vouchsafed, whether happily or unhappily, to hew their way into Cawnpore under Havelock, and thereby secure a view of the results of Nana Sahib's work in and around that now historic well.

With torn and tattered uniform, bleeding from a prodigious cut in the head, and thoroughly begrimed with powder from the roots of his red hair to the soles of his feet, the tall Scotchman presented a singularly dramatic figure. It was after a swift look into the face of a dead woman, about whose neck were coiled the slender arms of a four-year-old boy, also dead, that the big non-commissioned officer uttered the awful, indescribable scream that had so shocked and awed his comrades, and which so many had since supposed had marked the at least partial dethronement of his reason.

Not that many men similarly situated would not have cried out. Five years before, this slip of a woman—she looked very slender and girlish as she lay there, so still, on the top of that woeful heap—had been a bonny, merry-hearted milkmaid, dancing over the heather of her father's tiny farm beyond Dundee. And the little chap with the yellow curls and the great, saucy blue eyes, who clung so closely to his mother's neck despite the cruel bayonet thrust through his little body—had he not been the life and soul of the barracks, the pet of the officers and the idol of the men? Yes; considering the days and nights of anguish, the hoping against hope, the bitter suspense and then this grievous ending to it all, Sergeant Donald Macfarlane had good excuse for crying out. Many a strong man has done so on even less provocation.

While his frenzied comrades rushed madly away to the slaughter and the sack, the Scottish sergeant knelt, in perfect silence, after that one cry, beside his dead. He straightened out the form of his wife and arranged her disordered garments decently. Then he loosened the clasp of the little arms and took his boy into his own mighty ones.

After the fighting was over they found him there, kissing the white cheeks and crooning lullabies to the little fellow in his quaint, North Country dialect. When they led him away he laughed, and kicked playfully at the head of a dead Sepoy that lay in his path.

* * * * * *

All through the long, hot siege of Delhi Sergeant Donald Macfarlane performed his duties as became a man and a soldier. And yet there was something queer about him. He would stand for a half hour at a time gazing stolidly up at the scorching Indian sky, gnawing and tugging nervously at the straggly red beard about which his comrades had been in the habit of joking him so mercilessly in happier times. He even forgot to salute his officers at times, but was never reproved for it. There was a tacit recognition of his condition throughout the regiment. Behind his back he was pityingly spoken of as "Poor daft Donald!" The nickname explained it all. Sergeant Macfarlane was evidently not himself mentally. Whether or not his fighting qualities were unimpaired could only remain a matter of conjecture.

And so the burning days dragged themselves along until August came, and with it Nicholson, with reinforcements from the Punjaub. And then, more waiting, until the middle of September, when the immortal assault was decided upon.

It was the night before that prodigious scene of storm and tumult in which the intrepid Nicholson fell. In the British camp there was silence, but in one of the white tents Sergeant Donald Macfarlane and some eight or ten of his company were seated at a long, rough table, drinking and discussing in undertones the probable events of the morrow. Outside, the quiet stars were shining as gently and placidly as if the coming daylight were not to witness one of the direst scenes of carnage in history.

Under the influence possibly of the great joy of the anticipated combat, Sergeant Macfarlane had seemed more like himself during the day. He had thawed out to some of his comrades, and was even now drumming gently on the table with his big horny fingers, as a burly private, with a pronounced Cockney accent, trolled out, in a voice by no means unmusical, some popular Whitechapel lay.

The minstrel was in the very middle of a stanza, when, to the utter astonishment of everyone present, Sergeant Macfarlane leapt to his feet with a look in his face that no one present had ever seen there before. His small, blue eyes were blazing, and there was a thin line of foam on his white, twitching lips.

He hurled his glass of brandy to the floor, and banged on the table with his great fist, as he shouted: "Dinna-r-r sing, mon! Dinna-r-r sing!"

The manner in which he rolled out the r's would have stopped any song. It certainly stopped this one. Some of the men looked annoyed; others questioning and pitying.

It was the interrupted singer himself that presently spoke: "Wot hails yer, Donald, me lad?" he asked wonderingly.

The big Scotchman was staring over their heads. "Hist, ye loons!" he cried hoarsely. "D'ye remember Cawnpore?"

Instantly every figure grew tense and every face hard.

"Aye!" went on "daft Donald," his voice rising from a roar to a sort of shriek, "ye mind it weel, I hae nae doot. Weel—I hae mindit it. An' it's puir business ye're in, lads, singin' an' shoutin' the nicht, when it's down on yer knees afore the Lord ye should be, praisin' Him for the chance to smite the black fiends, heep an' thigh, on the morrow! Listen, lads! Ye are a' brave an' honest an' true. Nae better men e'er wore the Queen's scarlet. Wull ye tak an oath wi' me the nicht?"

The fury of battle had leaped into every eye at the man's words. As he finished there was a roaring bass chorus: "Aye, Donald; we will!"

"Then," went on Sergeant Macfarlane, in tones that evidenced the deadliness of his intent, "be the memory o' ma deed Jess—be the memory o' ma little eennocent Donald—be the memory o' a' te ither butchert anes, I sweer lads, that on the morrow I'll spare neither mon, wumman, nor chiel that fa's intil these hans be slain. Come, sweer wi' me!"

He stretched out his great hands, and they were grasped in turn by the other men. The oath was taken. Whereupon, Sergeant Donald Macfarlane, weakly enough, sank into his seat, bowed his shaggy red head across his arms on the table, and sobbed like a child. His comrades, who were quite unused to this sort of thing, sneaked one by one out of the tent.

* * * * *

No soldier of the storming party fought as the red-headed Scottish giant fought that day. After four hours of tumult and butchery—butchery that brought the keenest delight to his now utterly savage soul—he found himself without a scratch, and, truth to tell, a little weary. The streets were thick with dead and wounded, and from many a glittering column and pinnacle streams of flame were pouring.

Begrimed with powder and blood, and choking with thirst, the sergeant stood leaning against the bamboo doorpost of an unpretentious dwelling in a side street, watching a miniature battle going on between a dozen Sepoys and redcoats fifty feet away. He looked up wearily as a burly private, with bloodstained pugaree tied round his forehead, and minus his helmet, staggered up to him with outstretched hand. It was Bill Smith, the Whitechapel minstrel of the previous evening.

"Well, ole chap," he shouted, "hain't this bloomin' glorious? An' 'ave yer been pyin' hoff old scores, hay?"

The Scotchman glanced at the weapon in his hand. He had thrown away his musket and picked up a beautiful curved sword with a hilt of gold studded with jewels. The red blade told its own story. "Daft Donald" smiled grimly as he answered, "I hae kept ma vow."

Bill looked at him and noted the calm look in the blue eyes. The battle and the slaughter seemed to have brought back the man's reason.

At the private's suggestion they entered the building in search of water. It seemed to be deserted. Passing through a dim passage they came into a long, light room, with a low white ceiling. As they entered, a Hindoo woman, half clad, and her black hair streaming over her shoulders, sprang from a crouching attitude on the floor, and stood with her back against the wall, dumb with terror. At her side, and holding her by the hand, stood a little brown urchin, with inky hair and big, wondering eyes.

"Daft Donald" gave a scream of delight and sprang forward with sword upraised. His companion clutched him by the arm, crying hoarsely: "Sergeant—for the love o' God!"

Macfarlane turned upon him sternly. "Hoot mon!" he exclaimed contemptuously, "dost mind thy oath?"

The Cockney private's face flushed through the powder stains. "Aye," he answered simply.

"Then," roared the Scotchman, "do thy share. Bayonet the mother—I'll do for the brat!"

The other threw his weapon to the floor with a crash. "I'll see yer dead furst," he said. The little Indian boy jumped forward and began to play delightedly with the bright bayonet.

But now the light of madness flashed into the Scotchman's eyes once more. With a howl of fury he sprang at the woman and tore from her neck a slender gold chain to which a small gold locket was attached. "Look, mon!" he screamed to Private Smith, "ma Jessie's locket—ma weddin' gift. Wha gae it her? The hounds that slew *her an' him!* Wuman"—turning to the trembling mother—"thy time has come!"

He had poised himself for the thrust, but was spared the necessity of making it. There was a volley of musketry in the street, and some of the bullets tore through the windows. One of them ended for ever the career of brave Bill Smith, and sent a Whitechapel house into mourning. Another laid the Indian mother low and lifeless, and even "Daft Donald" was touched in the head in a manner that made him spin round like a top, though he did not lose his footing.

There was a queer, numb feeling in his brain. He knelt down beside the woman (who seemed very young and very pretty for her race), and saw she was quite dead. He was interrupted by the child, who looked quite funny in the white cotton shirt that left the little brown legs and feet exposed. The child came crawling over on his hands and knees, and, whimpering strangely, began to poke his pudgy fists into his mother's cheeks and throat.

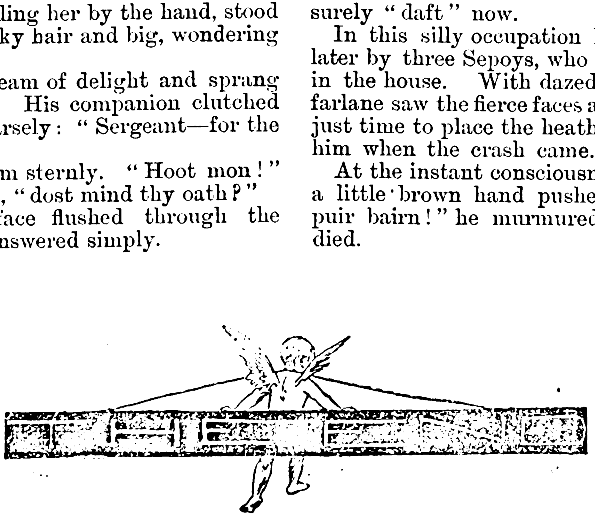
Sergeant Macfarlane reached out stealthily and grasped his sword. He pointed it at the baby breast. The little fellow laughed gaily and patted its shining side in glee. The brown eyes looked curiously into the executioner's blue ones.

Then, methinks, "Daft Donald's" reason must have given way utterly, for he cast the sword far from him, and, grasping the little heathen to his broad breast, began to weep over him hysterically. Then, after this singular proceeding, he began to play peek-a-boo with him over his mother's body. Yes, old Donald was surely "daft" now.

In this silly occupation he was discovered an hour later by three Sepoys, who were seeking a hiding-place in the house. With dazed eyes Sergeant Donald Macfarlane saw the fierce faces and muskets levelled, and had just time to place the heathen baby protectingly behind him when the crash came.

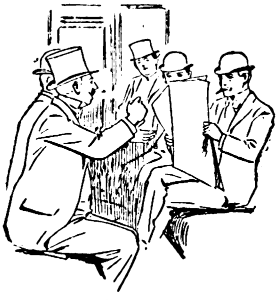
At the instant consciousness was leaving him he felt a little brown hand pushed into his. "Puir bairn! puir bairn!" he murmured, pressing it gently, and so died.

F. H.



A STUDY IN CHALK.

A MIDDLE-AGED gentleman—either a lunatic or on the point of insanity. After a moment's consideration I decided on the former. His violent gestures, his white passionate face, and the torrent of abuse which poured from his lips were attracting general attention. A small crowd had collected round him on the platform. Neither before nor since, in man or woman, have I witnessed such an incontrollable fit of anger. To make matters worse he had a thousand words to say, and the train was actually gliding out of the station. He shouted, he stormed, he raved. The inspector, suave, polite, imperturbable, accustomed no doubt to the vituperation of frenzied passengers, remained admirably calm under the ordeal, and at the last moment lifted him bodily into our compartment. He was still talking as he made his meteor-like entrance through the doorway.



"Confounded idiot!" he repeated.

"You may say what you like," he shouted, "but I don't believe you and I never shall. You took it by the string. I tell you I saw you. You carried it by the string, and, of course, it broke. You confounded idiot!"

One could see the throat vibrating, the hands clenched, the angry knots standing out on his forehead.

"Confounded idiot!" he repeated, glaring round on his fellow passengers, who were watching him from behind their newspapers aghast at the bitterness of his tone. "He says that he never touched the string. P'r'aps he thinks that it came to pieces by itself just for the fun of the thing. P'r'aps—and now it's spoilt—ruined—the best thing that I ever did—a beautiful drawing—worth £50 at the least—the very least!" and he broke off with a sort of moan.

I looked round the compartment. Everyone was smiling. There is something irresistibly droll about the misfortunes of other people. Something ludicrous about the hopeless condition of a man who has lost his temper and finds no one to vent his ill humour upon. I alone succeeded in maintaining some appearance of gravity.

"It is very annoying," I said stupidly. It seems so unsympathetic to remain silent, although commonplaces sting an injured man like salt in an open wound.

"Annoying!" he shouted, turning round on me. "It's maddening, sir, maddening! What am I do? It was beautiful, although I say it who have no right to—beautiful. I might try for weeks, for ever, and never catch the expression again."

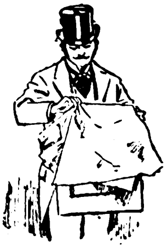
His voice broke. He was evidently unstrung. But it was inexcusable forcing his private affairs on half-a-dozen strangers. And to make matters worse, he was unmistakably English—his light hair, his blue eyes, the strong jaw, with its regular well-shaped teeth, all singled him out as a fellow-countryman. Had he been alone at that moment, however, no doubt he would have taken the windows, and seats, and racks into his confidence.

"The picture was from a sitting, sir—a special sitting," he went on, speaking fast, and still boiling over with rage. "What will the lady say when I arrive? Imagine what a fool I shall look. It is ignominious—horrible. My ticket is so much money thrown away."

His gesture of despair, his pathetic tone, the whole situation was too much for the man opposite. There was an audible laugh, and then someone else gave a guffaw.

I felt angry. My lunatic had perhaps brought it on himself. The louder a child cries the less his nurse pities him. It is silence which betokens a serious injury. So with grief. But there are exceptions. There are certain excitable dispositions which cannot be judged by the ordinary standard. That my lunatic was in genuine distress I was perfectly convinced, and I could have kicked the man opposite with the utmost satisfaction for that ill-timed, ill-mannered laugh. The old gentleman was stung to the quick. He realised for the first time that he was making himself a laughing stock.

"There is a comical side to the affair, of course," he said, with a sudden calm in the angry tempest of his voice. He was perfectly collected now, and the flush which lingered in his cheek was as much of shame as of anger. "I have had a good fit of temper, but it is over now. Heigh ho! And I was so pleased with the picture, too."



Lifting the tissue paper.

As he said, there was a comical side to the adventure, and the comic element was his own rage. One felt instinctively that the ruined portrait was his masterpiece—a portrait of some woman for whose opinion he cared in no ordinary degree. The inspector had taken it by the string, and the string had broken. A drawing in chalk is easily injured, and the sight of his precious work lying face downwards on the dusty platform had for the moment transformed a respectable middle-aged gentleman into a fiend. No trace of his ungovernable fury was now discernible on the placid face.

My lunatic had taken up his *Pall Mall Gazette*, and was reading it upside down! Every now and then he gave a sharp drawn breath. Once he threw down his paper on the floor and picked it up again. I knew exactly how he felt when I saw this little display. At the first station he jumped out, went to the guard's van, and brought back his precious picture.

"I am not going to inconvenience you, gentlemen," he said in a pleasant voice, "but if I may put it on the seat I shall feel happy."

My lunatic was standing in the middle of the carriage fumbling over a knot in the broken string, and tearing back the paper. All of a sudden a tear fell with a solemn little splash on the back of his hand. I felt a lump rising in my throat, and turned my head away and looked out of the window.

When I glanced round again the knot had come undone; he was tenderly lifting the tissue paper. We all leant forward.

The portrait was that of a lovely fair-haired girl. Just the head and the pretty rounded shoulders drawn with consummate art and skill. For the first moment, however, I saw nothing but the eyes. They thrilled me then; they haunt the galleries of memory now. There was a wondering wistful look in their soft brown lustre, a far away light of spiritual immersement in some ethereal dreamland.

We all looked at it spell-bound, and then one by one my fellow passengers went back to their reading. After all, the damage done by the fall was not great. But the work was ruined to an artist's eye. The colours had been shaken from their places, and here and there a smudge marred the perfection of the outline. On the whole I think my lunatic was relieved. The picture had suffered less than he supposed. It was not ruined. When I alighted a few minutes later he was actually smiling, and pointing out the beauties of a sunset to his fellow passengers.

"We never see these glorious skies with their blood-shot gold and rose and purple in London," he said. "I love the country."

He seemed perfectly happy.

For weeks this little scene lingered in my thoughts. It was one of those trivial incidents in life which make a deep impression on our minds. A story begun and broken off like a novel opened and closed before the finish.

Nearly a year later I was dining with my friend Sclater, journalist, plagiarist, and writer of stories. His rooms in Piccadilly were handsomely furnished with a number of great easy chairs and comfortable lounges, and scores of silver frames and expensive knick-knacks scattered about in every part, and curiosities gathered from the four quarters of the globe.

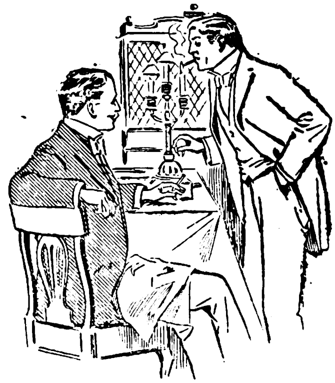
Dessert was finished. The conversation had drifted into "shop," for Sclater could talk about his profession for hours, and never grow uninteresting.

"Anyone who takes the trouble can learn to write," he observed, in his silvery tones. "Fortunately, this is a fact not generally known, or the world would be so busy writing, that no one would have any time to read." He got up, removed a rose-coloured shade from one of the candles, and bent forward to light a cigarette.

"Observation is of far more value than imagination," he went on, pushing the port across the table, and seating himself again. "My stories which sell best are all lifted bodily from real life!"

"The commonplace is often uncommon," I replied; and my mind went back to that little scene in the railway carriage. When I told Sclater the story, he laughed.

"Would you like to hear the sequel?" he asked, leaning back in his chair and playing with a tiny vase of geraniums with his long, slender fingers.



Bent forward to light a cigarette.

I nodded.

Sclater rose from his seat and crossed over to the other end of the room. He brought back a photograph in either hand and laid them down on the table in front of me.

"Do you recognise either of those?" he asked.

"Certainly; my lunatic and the girl whose portrait he showed us."

"Your lunatic is my father," Sclater observed, very quietly indeed.

"You're joking," I cried.

"Not a bit of it," he replied. "No, don't apologise, please. Not a word. I want to tell you the rest of your story."

He wheeled two chairs round to the fire, pushed back the table a little, and rang the bell for coffee. I sat with one of the photographs on each knee, staring at them, and wondering what was coming next.

"My father has always been as poor as a church mouse," Sclater began in his matter-of-fact way, striking a match on his boot and handing it to me. "He calls himself an artist, but he only once drew anything artistic, and that was the picture you saw. One day a friend came into his studio.

"'Sclater,' he said, 'Do you want a job?'

"'What kind?' said my father. He would have been glad to hold horses if any one had offered him the post.

"'To draw the portrait of a lady. She will give you two sittings and pay your own price.'

"'Her name?'

"'Violet Lyndhurst.'

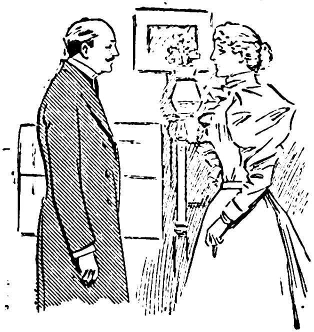
"Well, my father accepted the commission. An appointment was made, and in due time he went down with his chalks and things to Eastbourne, where the lady lived. She was, as you know from her portrait, and, as you can see from that photograph, young and extremely beautiful. From the first moment that he set eyes upon her he knew that he had met his fate. I think the face reminded him a little of my dear mother's, who died when I was born. It was this fact, perhaps, which inspired his pencil. As he worked he found that a wonderful speaking likeness was springing up at his touch. It is not difficult to imagine the pleasure which this discovery must have been to him. It was this which he had waited and prayed for all his life—a masterpiece at last. A drawing which would hand his name down to fame.

"The thought of the pleasure which this exquisite crayon would give to his beautiful patron transported him into a seventh heaven of delight. What easier way of winning her good graces?

"At the end of the first sitting Miss Lyndhurst thanked him graciously, but to his surprise she did not ask to see his drawing or show any curiosity about the progress of his work except to ask:

"'Do you think it is like me?'

"He said 'Yes,' and went away a little disappointed at her coldness, but glad on the whole to think that she would not see the picture until it was finished and perfect. His success delighted him. He carried the precious drawing away to work at it in his studio. A week later he set out again."



"Do you think it is like me?"

Sclater stopped to break open a new box of cigars. His servant had brought in the coffee, and he poured out mine and handed it to me.

"Go on," I said breathlessly.

"You know what happened next," he replied, with a little laugh. "This is where you first make the acquaintance of your lunatic. He goes to the station, treading on air. He actually whistles, he feels so gay and happy. There is some mistake about his luggage, and he intrusts the picture for a moment to an inspector. The string comes undone, it slips out of its wrapper on to the platform.

"I am not surprised that you should have mistaken him for a lunatic then. I think even a man of your phlegmatic disposition would have been for a moment off your guard. He had taken such pride in his work, he had been looking forward with such eagerness to receiving his divinity's praise. No doubt he had pictured to himself the moment when she would throw up her hands in delight; he could see her standing over his work, pleased, happy, delighted, and, best of all, grateful to him. A word of praise from her, a smile, a look of pleasure would have been the sweetest thing in the world that he could have.

"And now it was all over. The picture lay on its face in the dust. This was the end of all his hopes and his dreams. He had looked forward in a vague and uncertain way to her surprise and enjoyment of his wonderful work. One can imagine the bitterness of his disappointment, and what a blow it must have been to his ambition."

Sclater stopped to light his cigar afresh.

"Never mind your cigar," I almost shouted; "get on with the story."

He leant forward, poking the fire into a blaze.

"The poor old governor!" he said to himself. "It is a curious story," he continued reflectively; "a very strange story. You can imagine how furious he was. Of course, he might have begun over again; but the chances were, as he told you, that he would never succeed so well a second time. Sometimes one does in five minutes what a year would not be long enough to do again."

"But the picture was not really spoilt?"

"It was not so much damaged as he supposed. By degrees he regained his spirits. It was still possible to make the portrait beautiful. He found Miss Lyndhurst already in her chair when he arrived.

"'Good-morning,' she said, looking up with a bright smile as he entered; 'I have been looking forward to your visit. Do you think it will be beautiful? Tell me.'

"'I hope so,' he answered simply.

"Then he set to work, and all the time he was thinking:

"'Will she be pleased with it? Will *she* think it beautiful?'

"A sort of fever came over him. He felt his cheeks burning, and sometimes his hands trembled so with excitement that he could hardly hold the colours.

"'Will *she* think it beautiful?'

"'Suppose, after all, she was not pleased—suppose——'

"He would not listen to such thoughts.

"Minutes flew by, and hours, and still he worked on.

"How sweet the permission seemed to stand there, drinking in her beauty. By now he knew every line of the beautiful face by heart. On, on, in frantic haste.

"'What will she think of it?' he kept on saying to himself. He wanted to stop and show it to her. But, no. He must wait until it was finished.

"At last he threw down his pencil.

"Now the time came he felt as if the strain was more than is good for a man to bear. He could hear his heart beating, and the perspiration stood out on his forehead. He lifted it from the easel and brought it round to where his model was sitting. A beautiful smile shone in her face.

"'What do you think of it?' he asked. His voice sounded odd and husky. 'I have done my best;' and he bowed his head a little.

"He felt her hand laid on his arm.

"'Do you not know, sir,' she said, in a calm silvery voice. 'Did they not tell you that *I am blind?*'"

* * * * * *

Sclater pushed back his chair. I, too, rose to my feet. He took one of the photographs from my hands and kissed it.

"I am proud of my little step-mother," he said. "You must come and dine with my people some day and meet her yourself."

W. A. W.

A Woman of To-Morrow.

To ascend Duncombe Hill, even at a slow pace, requires the exercise of a certain amount of energy, and Miss Lilian Kennedy had gained the summit—starting from the little footbridge which spanned the small stream in the valley beneath—in less than half an hour, which would have been considered good walking for many a man.

No wonder then that she was somewhat heated with her exertions, and turning round, so as to let the cooling wind play upon her face, she took off her hat and drank in with evident delight the bracing air for which the well-known eminence is so justly famed.

Far away as the eye could reach was a tract of wild, desolate moorland, with here and there in the valley beneath and the sides of the hill she had just mounted cosy-looking farmhouses, some with a few hundred acres of cultivated land attached; others with merely a few fields, and then tracts of common, on which the gorse bloomed luxuriantly. It was, in fact, what is called in England a poor farming district, where everyone was poor and the hardest work meant only the meanest living.

Had her thoughts been bared for inspection it would have been found that they ran on the utter hopelessness of existing under such conditions, and it was the impossibility of so doing that was at the moment exercising the mind of Lilian Kennedy.

Standing there in all the pride of her young womanhood, it seemed to her impossible that any human being in his or her senses could voluntarily bury themselves in such obscurity, and yet a year or two ago she would have thought very differently. Then, indeed, to have lived in the peaceful valley beneath, caring nought for the doings of the big world beyond, but happy and content in the Arcadian existence of the fields and woods, would have been sufficient for her; but the last two years had wrought a wonderful change.

A course of education at a woman's college, at which she had become imbued with other ideas than the mere acquirement of knowledge, and had been led away by the desire for emancipation from the thraldom pertaining to her sex, had transformed her from a lovable girl into an ambitious woman, anxious to take her place in the race of life; to strive for, and happily to obtain, eminence in one or other of the learned professions, and to work out a career for herself. In fact, to be a woman of the future rather than a nonentity of the present, only fit to be made love to, courted, and married; to sink her identity and her very name in that of the man who should make her his wife.

And now at length her dream of ambition was about to be fulfilled, for she had worked hard at college, and come out high up in the list of honours. For a time she had been undecided as to what profession to enter; then she had settled on going in for medicine. At college she had spared no time or pains to do well in her final examination, and to-day, less than two hours ago, the announcement had come that she had passed—and passed well, too—and that, henceforth, she was entitled to style herself:

LILIAN KENNEDY, M.D.

The mystic letters had an irresistible attraction for her. They spoke of hard work, of ambition, and of prejudice triumphantly trodden under foot.

Woman's mission in life, she had been heard to declare, was to alleviate suffering, and how could she do this more successfully than by practising as a doctor?

Standing there against the sky-line, with her erect figure and her head thrown proudly back, the idea filled her with satisfaction. A great responsibility had fallen upon her, and she would do her best to act up to it.

She turned and her glance wandered away down the hillside until it rested upon the gabled roof of a picturesque old house, a farmhouse apparently, but of a better stamp than others in the vicinity.

This was Fairfax Place, and Lilian knew it well; many a time had she spent pleasant evenings there in her unambitious days, and the house and its inmates were alike well known to her.

Of the latter there were three—Mrs. Fairfax, her daughter, and a son.

Idly Lilian watched the thin line of smoke curling lazily along the hillside.

She knew whose hands had lighted that fire. Gentle, ladylike hands they were—white and ringless, with delicate wrinkles where the dimples had been once.

They were young hands, too. Hannah Fairfax was not more than thirty; but her youth and dimples had waned long ago. There had been much work and few servants at any time, and now the household had been still further reduced, so the gentle, lady-like hands had had to do their share. True, there had been a liberal application of mutton suet, and gloves had been drawn on—but the work was none the less light because it was done in gloves; perhaps the heavier.

There was something about Hannah Fairfax that repelled Lilian. Perhaps the timidity of her manner, perhaps the weakness and whiteness of her hands, that seemed half-ashamed of their honest labour, as if anyone need be ashamed of honest toil!

She was a pretty creature, with tired brown eyes and a fringe of carefully curled hair above her forehead.

Lilian wondered why she took the trouble to curl it—why she didn't brush it back and forget to put the frilling of lace in her collar. If she would only forget it once Lilian might forgive her. But the hopeless air of dressiness baffled the younger woman.

Once, indeed, she had met her by chance coming from the well with a water-bucket in her hand. Then she had worn a faded cotton wrapper, and her hands were in gloves, but the curls were there, and a dainty covering of powder protected her skin from the sun.

At sight of Lilian she had started and fallen back, a deep flush showing beneath the powder on her face, her tired eyes growing hurt and appealing.

"One of our servants is ill to-day," she had said deprecatingly, and Lilian had been stung by the polite lie. In one moment she had loved and hated the woman before her—loved her for her strength to labour and her beautiful pride—hated her for the appealing blush and the shame-faced little lie.

Why should she be ashamed of the truth—she, living in the twentieth century—when honest labour is more than a luxury, and strong hands above white ones?

Then, from thinking of the sister, Lilian passed to thinking of the brother.

She could fancy him returning from the fields, where he had been doing his share of work, his broad shoulders erect, his eyes glowing beneath his harvest hat.

She knew his story, as everyone about the place knew it. He had been to college, and was starting out into the world, when his mother had called him home. In response to a selfish whim of the gentle old lady he had come. "You must stay by me," she had said, "and by the old place; it's the only way to save it."

And he had stayed.

"Ah!" cried Lilian bitterly. She flung out her hands with a gesture almost of despair, a hot red blush mantling her face. "It is not just! It is not just! He might have done so much—so much—and now."

Suddenly she straightened herself and stood up, her black skirt clinging closely about her, her arms hanging loosely at her sides. From the open collar of her dress her white throat showed its sensitive lines. Her hat was still in her hand, and the heavy coil of hair had slipped low on her splendid head. She was thrilled with life—a superb specimen of health and strength, capable of passion and of action. She turned and descended the winding path which she had but lately come up.

At the end of the path, just where it passed into the roadway, ran a small sluggish stream. A wooden bridge ran across it. Lilian paused, her face showing white in the grey dusk.

She leant over the stream, seeing in its shallow water a faint caricature of her sensitive face.

Then she drew back.

"Lilian!"

Someone came from out of the dusty turnpike and faced her, standing upon the further end of the bridge. With a sudden tremor she recognised him. His eyes glowed beneath the brim of his straw hat, his strong hand was outstretched. There was a sudden stirring in her pulses, a vague sense of exaltation.

She gave him her hand. Then, with a sudden gesture, she threw back her head and looked into his eyes.

"I was thinking of you," she said.

"Of me?"

"Yes. I was thinking of the shame of it—of the pity of it. Have you no ambition? Are you utterly without manhood that you are content to waste your life like this?—that you let the world go by without a care, preferring to spend your youth upon a worn-out farm, tilling a worn-out soil? Ah, the shame of it!"

Her hot, reproachful eyes flashed over him. Beneath the fire of her words he wavered and trembled. The glow died from his face. It looked white and set through the grey gloom.

"Don't you see," he said appealingly, "it is a question of duty? My post is here; I cannot desert it. I owe it to my family—to my mother. Don't you see, if the old place were sold it would kill her?"

But she turned away with a little hopeless gesture.

"I don't see," she said coldly. "I could never see! It is absurd! It is a remnant of that old chivalry—so-called—of which the world is well rid."

Then her mood melted. She turned to him with sweet, prayerful eyes, stretching out appealing hands.

"Oh, go away!" she cried. "Go out into the world. You owe it to yourself. Success is so dear—so dear. Why shouldn't you know it?"

He took her hands, his warm, rapt gaze still bent upon her. "I love you," he said. "You know that I love you—love you well enough to sacrifice everything for you—everything! Love you so that the hardest life with you would be heaven!"

The girl did not tremble, did not run away. She looked at him steadily, her proud lips slightly apart.

"Well enough to leave this place for me—to come away and work and earn success for me—well enough for that?" Her voice was almost mocking in its earnestness.

"Can't you understand?" he cried. "Can you never understand? My mother needs me. I am her only son. It is duty—plain, practical duty. Will you yield nothing to that?" Then he grew yearningly tender.

"Ah, my love! my love!" he said. "Am I nothing to you? Is your love so weak? Can you not sacrifice something for me? Come to me here—here for a while—perhaps ten, perhaps twenty years. I am bound hand and foot, but you—you are free. Be a woman, Lilian; give yourself to me. It will not be hard; and there is love. What is the world? what is anything to love?"

Then she wavered.

"Not hard!" she cried passionately. "Not hard! Ah, it is a hard, hard thing to be a woman!"

With a desperate movement she broke from him, and fled along the road.

Once in her room the sense of oppression became unbearable. She went over to the window and, kneeling beside it, laid her hot cheek against the sill. All was dark and quiet, save for a faint stir in the room below, and a little stream of light cast from an open window upon the gravel path. To her right the big hill-top stood like a phantom sentinel guarding futurity.

"I cannot bear it!" cried Lilian; "I cannot bear it!"

Then the question rose and faced her blankly. It was a moment of supreme indecision. On one side all the womanhood within her asserted itself; on the other, a man's ambitions struggled to survive. It was the new woman warring against the old—the twentieth century rebelling against the nineteenth.

"Love is not for you," said Reason. But Reason was checkmated. Her womanly nature pinned it down.

"I love him! I love him!" she cried, "and I must have him!"

Yes; she would come to him, as he had said. She would become a woman for his sake, suffer as other women suffer, be patient as other women were patient. She would merge her identity into his, and, letting the world go by, think only of him and his child, as it lay upon her breast. She would give up her profession, she would let ambition go. She would—yes, she would, if necessary, do the housework in gloves, like Hannah Fairfax, and churn the butter. She saw herself growing old and wrinkled, saw the faded calico wrapper, and all the rest.

"Ah!" cried she suddenly, "what a life! what a life!"

She rested her head upon her arm, still kneeling beside the window. A luxuriant wisteria vine, that grew without, peeped shyly in at her, its purple blossoms just brushing her cheek. She looked across the hill far into the distance. The freshness of twilight came stealing in upon her, mingling with the faint odour of purple wisteria.

In the road beneath a well set-up man was moving along. She raised her head and leant far out, straining her eyes to catch the last outlines of his straight figure as it vanished beyond the stile.

"Ah!" said Lilian again, and left the window.

That night Lilian wrote a letter.

"You have asked me to decide," it said, "but I cannot. Love is stronger than I, but is love as strong as ambition? I do not know. Time will decide. I am going away. Do not follow me, do not seek to find me. You say you love me; then you must bear with me. Love will last. If I want you I will come back to you; if not—my life must be lived, and as yet my life means my work.

"You may not understand, for the women of to-day are different from the women you know—the women you have read of. In the nineteenth century a woman would have stayed; in the twentieth she must go."

And the next morning at daybreak she was driven to the little station. As she passed Fairfax Place her eyes sought eagerly for some trace of life. The house was dark and still. The shutters were tightly closed.

Then, as she looked, a figure appeared in the narrow path leading from the pasture—a figure in a faded cotton gown, with a milk pail in her small hand.

"Ah, what a life!" cried Lilian breathlessly.

Then the vehicle jogged along, and the figure was lost in the foggy distance.

* * * * *

Ten years later a woman sat alone in her consulting room—a tall woman with a beautiful dark head.

She was sitting before a small desk, upon which some loose papers were scattered, in her hand she held *The Lancet*, in which was a powerful essay of her own.

The woman leant her head upon her hand and looked thoughtfully through the open window.

Along the street people were passing hurriedly.

In the next street a hand-organ was grinding out a discordant air, the tune of an old-fashioned polka. She breathed quickly, pushing the hair from her brow as she did so with a firm, white hand. A letter lay upon the floor at her feet. Suddenly her eyes lowered, meeting the written lines.

"Your name has been suggested," it said, "in connection with the presidency of——"

She frowned and placed her foot upon it with a half-displeased gesture.

"So I may become the head of one of our greatest institutions," she said. "And—I am tired."

For a moment she was silent. People still passed hurriedly in the street. The hand-organ was moving farther away; its air grew fainter. Suddenly a baby's cry sounded fitfully without. Her gaze reached the window. A beggar woman had stopped, her shawl blown in the wind, and upon her breast a child.

The woman on the inside leant forward. A little cry escaped her; all the wonderful instinct of motherhood, which is strong in proportion to the weakness of women, swelled within her. There was a passionate leaping of her pulses. She longed to tear the child from the woman's breast—to feel its soft lips against her own. The letter lay trampled underfoot. Suddenly she spoke:

"My God!" she said, "what have I missed?"

The firm, flexible mouth softened.

"Oh, to know what it means," she cried. "To have one word, ever so little, only to know what his life had been—his life and mine—and mine. I would not change it," she cried. "I would not change it. And yet—and yet——"

She rose suddenly, some loose sheets of paper fluttering to the ground. She stretched out her arms with a wide, free movement.

"I will go to the old place to-day," she said.

As the sun was setting she stepped from the train at the little station, and walked rapidly across the field. She felt strangely restless. Now that the journey was ended, the vague impulse that had prompted her to undertake it seemed to fail her. By the act she seemed to have put the ten long years aside—to have come back to her girlhood—to Nature in its free, primitive state.

Once again she paused upon the hillside, resting her arms upon the bridge—an iron structure had taken the place of the old one—her gaze sweeping the fields and resting upon the gabled roof of a house above her. A warm colour had risen to her cheeks, and her eyes had dimmed and softened.

For a moment she wavered; then, with a firm step, she followed the winding path.

The house was quiet. From the kitchen chimney smoke was rising.

Then a man came quickly from the garden and stood in the gravelled path. In one moment the past came back to her. At first she saw only the aggressive manliness—all the straight length of him. Her womanhood had asserted itself after ten years of sexless suppression.

She went towards him, one hand outstretched, a heightened colour tinging her cheeks.

Then, as she neared him, her eyes cleared. Looking upon him, she saw that the years had passed him as they had passed the old place. She saw that his bronzed face had reddened and roughened, that the glow had left his eyes—saw that they were dull and content, as he was content. The direction in which she had progressed he did not know; he had taken no step forward for ten long years.

With a little gasp she met his outstretched hand, looking into his face—looking for something which she had not found, and could not find—something which was not and had never been.

"Lilian!" There was a pathetic awkwardness in his speech. "Lilian—I—I never thought that you would come back."

Then suddenly their hands fell apart and they stood silent, for a woman had come from behind the house and neared them—a small, tired woman in a soiled gown, with a child upon her breast—a woman who had borne many burdens, and whose strength had not been sufficient unto her need.

The man wavered.

"I—I never thought that you would come back," he repeated, "and—and this is my wife."

* * * * *

A while later, and Lilian walked rapidly away. She no longer felt a stirring of her pulse. The warm red had faded from her face. It looked white and set.

At the top of the hill she halted and looked about her, drawing a long, quiet breath. She saw with clear eyes the landscape. She saw the wild, rough land. She saw the distant moor. She saw the sun, a fiery ball, setting beyond their summits, flooding the hollow below with a roseate glow. The grey fog had not risen, softening the prospect. She saw it as it was, ragged and barren. And looking inward, she saw her own life, with its strong, bold lines unaltered. The old romance had fallen from her like a shadow, melting from her feet and passing to take its place among the many shadows that stood flanked within the past.

The woman held her head erect; not a muscle quivered. She stretched out her arms with a gesture of thankfulness.

"Oh, thank God!" she said, "thank God!"

Then the great head fell upon her arms, and she burst into tears.

And the sun went down.

Peter Parr.

The Prisoner at the Bar.

MANSLAUGHTER is an ugly crime, and of such a crime the prisoner at the bar—he gave his name as Saul Wray—was accused. An unfortunate countryman had been found dead by the roadside, bearing unmistakable marks of rough handling. Saul Wray had been last seen in his company, both men drinking heavily and quarrelling at frequent intervals. Late at night the two boon companions staggered from the tavern along the road, where one of them was found killed the next morning.

The other was afterwards discovered sleeping under a haystack, his hands covered with blood, his face cut and bruised, his jacket torn down the front. The gaol soon had him within its walls, charged with the committal of the crime; and the good folks of the village were on the tip-toe of excitement until the day of the trial arrived. The murdered man was a dissolute, idle character, well-known in the place, and there was but scant sympathy for his untimely end. Wray was a stranger to the place, and was apparently a tramp.

In due course the Assizes came on, and Saul Wray stood arraigned before a jury of his countrymen.

Judge Grayson, who was trying the case, was a well-known jurist of considerable eminence, and had a reputation for strict impartiality. The court was crowded when the case began, and many eyes were directed on the prisoner, who, it was noticed by some particularly observant individuals, seemed considerably startled on seeing Judge Grayson take his seat on the bench. A strange gleam come into his eyes, while an unearthly pallor crept over his swarthy countenance.

In a low tone he pleaded "Not Guilty!"

Of course, the evidence was purely circumstantial, but, nevertheless, sufficiently weighty to remove any doubts which might have existed regarding the prisoner's guilt.

There was a solemn hush in the court as the Crown Prosecutor rose to his feet and prepared to address the jury.

The prisoner leant over the rail in front of the dock, still with his eyes fixed, not on the speaker, but on the Judge, who leant back in his seat, and with his hands loosely clasped in his lap, his eyes half closed, listened attentively to counsel's speech. Occasionally his lordship opened and closed his fingers or toyed with his thumbs abstractedly, but the prisoner at the bar did not move a muscle or alter his keen, curious gaze.

He was an uncouth-looking individual.

Tall and loosely built, there was a certain slouch in his attitude that bespoke the genus "loafer." He had a swarthy sunburnt face, the lower portion of which was entirely concealed by rough tufts of tawny beard and whiskers, shaggy and unkempt; his high massive forehead was crowned with iron-grey hair, which looked as if a comb were altogether a stranger to it.

His teeth were firmly clenched; he breathed heavily; his eyes glowed with a weird light as they remained fastened on the face of the Judge, who evidently did not notice the fixity of their gaze. One hand of the prisoner was tightly grasping the rail in front of him, the other was thrust into the breast of his coat.

It was easy to forecast the verdict when the Crown Prosecutor sat down after speaking for just half an hour. The jury had their minds made up.

When Judge Grayson directed them to retire and consider their verdict, the foreman got up hurriedly and intimated that they had already arrived at a decision.

"We find the prisoner guilty, me lord."

All eyes now centred on the prisoner, who drew a long breath as the Judge turned towards him, and, in clear tones, asked if he desired to say anything before judgment was pronounced.

Paul Wray started, his eyes gleaming with living intensity; he drew himself up to his full height, crossing his arms on his breast. There was a breathless pause, and then there came but one word from the clenched teeth of the prisoner at the bar:

"Brother!"

Judge Grayson started violently, opening his keen grey eyes full on the speaker, his face paling, his hands tightly clasping the arms of his chair.

"Brother William!"

Judge Grayson half rose to his feet, with an exclamation of mingled horror and surprise, then sank back in his seat, trembling visibly.

In deep tones the prisoner at the bar spoke to him:

"You do not recognise me, Brother William, and I do not wonder, for it would be hard indeed to know me now, so changed am I from that brother who left you years ago to seek his fortune in Australia. Yes, William Grayson, I am your brother Paul. I went to the bad long ago. I am at the end of my tether now. I do not ask your sympathy. I do not deserve it. Do with me as you will."

There was a low, indefinite murmur in the crowded court as he stopped and bowed his head, as if evoking judgment.

Pitying eyes turned on the judge, who appeared crushed by the shock of the revelation, and the Crown Prosecutor started up himself as if about to speak.

Judge Grayson motioned him to desist, and rose to his feet, leaning heavily on the table in front of him. His face was white, his features drawn; his lips moved several times before speech came from them.

"Prisoner at the bar——"

He stopped short, and drew his hand sharply across his eyes, then went on abruptly:

"You have been tried and found guilty of a most grave crime. The evidence against you has fully convinced me of your guilt. The jury, by their verdict, have endorsed that evidence and strengthened my conviction. I have, therefore, no course open to me but to sentence you to penal servitude for the natural term of your life."

Paul Grayson lifted his head with a start of incredulity.

Judge William Grayson met his questioning glance with a look of intense pain, and murmured in an almost inaudible tone:

"Brother, forgive me!"

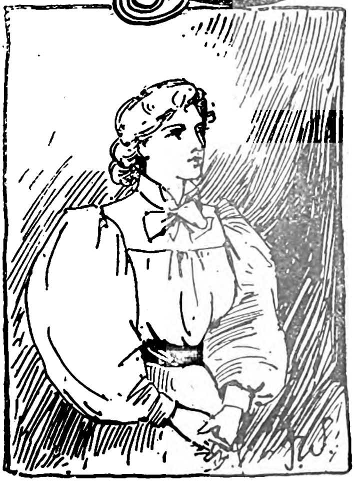
He drew himself up with an effort, and motioned to the constables to remove the condemned man.

Just one moment of deep silence in court; then there was a heavy thud on the raised daïs, and a horrified cry from the breathless crowd as the prisoner was removed from the dock.

Judge Grayson had fallen senseless.

ANNIE DAVIS.

FOR LOVE'S SAKE



I.

Mr. Langham, of Grindelthorpe, sat alone in his snuggery and listened to the wind. It raged furiously in the chimney-stacks; it shrieked, it wailed, it drove the snow into drifts in the surrounding meadows and on the high road. He listened to it with a certain pleasure, for it reminded him of days long gone by, when he was young, and the world looked brighter than it did now.

Langham sat in a large cushioned chair, his feet resting on the skin of a grizzly bear, with the head and claws attached, and the divan in the corner was covered with deerskins; there were innumerable curiosities and trophies of arrows, and a scalping knife, an old rifle, looking as if it had seen much service, a portentous bowie knife, an array of stock whips (Langham had made his money on a cattle ranche in America), and coiled around the Indian trophies on the wall, and making a sort of frame for them, a black snake whip, its long shiny thong bearing some resemblance to the reptile after which it was called.

Langham gazed meditatively into the fire. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with grizzled hair and beard, hard-featured and weather-beaten, with a square, determined jaw, very keen eyes, and imperturbable manner; he held a pipe in his hand, which he had apparently taken to refill and had forgotten. He was alone in the world, and through no fault of his own; his daughter Amy had been the apple of his eye.

Two years and a half ago she had married clandestinely, and, worse still, she had married a scamp, and for two years he had heard nothing of her. Her husband, by name Jack Kelly, was the son of a wealthy tradesman in the neighbouring town. She was nineteen when she married him, and he near twenty-four; handsome enough to please the eye of most girls, but "handsome is that handsome does," and Kelly's doings were unhandsome. He was deeply in debt, he was a gambler, and he not infrequently drank; he promised amendment to Amy, and for six months after the marriage he kept his word. At the end of six months, however, Kelly fell in with some boon companions after the horse fair, got drunk, was mixed up in a street row, knocked down a policeman, and was locked up for the night. He was fined, of course, with the option of fourteen days' imprisonment; his father paid the fine, which was the heaviest that could be imposed, and turned him then and there out of his house. He had paid Jack's debts twice, he was now past his patience; he altered his will, and when he died three months later his money went almost entirely to local charities, and his son did not even receive the proverbial shilling.

Amy no sooner heard the news of her husband's conduct than she wrote bidding Kelly claim her at once, and take her with him when he left the place to seek his fortune. She informed her father of her marriage. It was a heavy blow to Langham. He said little, however. He saw Kelly, and told him that he would never receive him as a son-in-law. If he chose to go away and never molest his wife in any way, he would forgive Amy her deception.

"Mr. Langham," Kelly had said, "that's for Amy to decide. If she chooses to forbid me to see her I shan't claim her against her will. I may not be a very creditable member of society, but I'm not the man to drag a woman away with me against her will because the law gives me power to do it."

Langham turned inquiringly to his daughter. Amy was a slender little creature, with a soft, fair face, and tender brown eyes. She had a peculiarly quiet, gentle manner.

"Father," she had said, "you are right to be vexed with me. I've been very wrong, ungrateful, and deceitful to you, but I hoped it would turn out differently." She held out her hand to her husband. "You broke your word to me, Jack," she said; "you promised you wouldn't do so again; but, unless I'm a burden to you, I promised to stand by you till one or other of us die; I love you, and I'll go with you." So Amy and Jack Kelly left Grindelthorpe, and Langham had heard nothing of them since.

II.

Langham rose with a sigh, and began to refill the empty pipe, when a knock—a sharp, decided knock—came to the door opening into the room. He laid down the pipe, drew aside the curtains, shot back the bolts, and opened the door; the wind burst in with a shriek, blowing with it a cloud of snow; in the doorway stood the figure of a man, carrying in his arms the form of an insensible woman.

"Mr. Langham," said the voice of Kelly, "will you let me speak to you?"

"No," said Langham shortly, "I won't; it's like your impudence to come here. You and Amy have chosen your own road; take it, and leave me to go mine."

"For mercy's sake, hear me," said the other, "unless you want to see your daughter's dead body lying on your threshold to-morrow. I don't come here to plead for myself."

"I'll hear you," said Langham very quietly, "if you'll be brief."

"Let me come in," said Kelly panting.

"Come in," said Langham, and Kelly entered. His eyes were hollow, he looked poor and shabbily dressed, his hat had been blown away by the raging wind, the snow lay on his hair and melted there. Amy, totally unconscious, lay in his arms; her little figure looked slenderer than ever, she was very poorly and thinly clad, her face was wan and shrunken; her pretty soft hair, loosened by the wind, streamed over her husband's shoulder; he put her gently in the chair by the fire.

Langham resolutely averted his eyes from his daughter. "Now, Mr. Kelly," said he, as he closed the door, "you promised to be brief."

"I've come to ask you," said Kelly, "to forgive Amy and take her home; I told her we would plead to you for both of us, but I only ask you to be good to her. I can't stand seeing her suffer—the best, the bravest, the truest little wife that ever a man had; she's never reproached me once, Mr. Langham. I haven't touched anything stronger than water since I left here, and I haven't touched a card—upon my soul I haven't. We did all right for the first year—I got work in a factory, and we were happy, and we saved, or she did, but she was very ill when—when the child was born, and it died, and she fretted terribly; and then I broke my arm and couldn't work, and our money went, and trade was bad, and they discharged a lot of the hands, and we've been going down hill ever since. Take her home, and I'll go away, and I won't trouble her again unless I'm in a position to keep her in comfort."

"You're tired of her, I fancy," said Langham, "that's about it; how do I know you've really turned over a new leaf. You've married my girl, and you must abide by your bargain."

"You won't forgive her?" said Kelly.

"No," said Langham, "I won't."

"Great Heaven," cried the other, "what shall I do?"

Langham opened the door. "Why," said he, "I think you'd better continue your journey."

"She'll die," cried Kelly, "before I can get her to shelter."

"The workhouse is three miles ahead," said Langham drily.

"The workhouse?" cried the other. "Great Heavens, man, she'll die before I can get her there, in the dark and in this wind, and the drifts up to one's waist. Look at her, the poor little girl, as frail and slender as a child. It's murder; give her shelter for to-night. Save her life; I'll walk on. I'll claim her to-morrow; if I don't, turn her out. Keep her here to-night, for pity's sake."

"You're wasting your breath," said Langham carelessly.

"Then shame upon you," cried Kelly angrily. "Poor Amy's crime is only that she loved a blackguard too well to turn her back on him when everyone else did. She kept her marriage from you for a time, true, but is that a sin to deserve death? I tell you, you'll kill her as surely as if you stabbed her to the heart. It's certain death. She's nearly dead now, my poor little wife. God help us both. What can I do? Heaven knows, I'd be cut to pieces if that would save her. But I am helpless, and you'll not stir hand or foot to save the life of your own child."

Langham looked at him and became meditative. "You've an uncommonly fluent tongue, young man," he said, quietly and reflectively. "It's easy to say you'd do that or you'd do this. You'd change your tune if you were put to the test. I'll try you. Will you save your wife's life? Will you pay for her night's shelter?"

"You're mocking me," said Kelly, "you know I've not a cent in the world, or I shouldn't be here to-night."

"Who said you had?" retorted Langham. "I said, would you pay. I didn't name the price."

"What do you mean?" said Kelly.

Langham turned and drew the thong of the black snake from the wall, and flung it on the table.

"That's what I mean," said he, "do you love your wife well enough to take fifty lashes from that, if I give her food and shelter for the night?"

Kelly started, the blood rushed to his face, and faded, leaving him deadly white.

"Do you mean it?" he asked.

"I do," said Langham; "those are my terms; that's the price you must pay for Amy's life."

"What possible motive can you have?" said the other.

"Perhaps I want to make her a widow," said Langham. "I think I could finish you with that, once I started; no one knows you're here; I might shovel you out of the way before morning and tell the girl you've deserted her. Perhaps I hate you and want to pay you out; my motives don't concern you, and I shan't give them; it's a pure matter of business. I tell you my terms for saving Amy's life—take them or leave them."

He spoke with perfect coolness as though proposing the most ordinary business transaction in the world.

Kelly hesitated. He took a step forward and looked at Amy's white, shrunken little face; he looked at the long shiny thong on the table; he looked at Langham's impassive face; he was silent.

"You funk it," said Langham; "I don't blame you; most people would shrink from certain tortures and possible or probable death, only you see you talked so mighty big about being cut to pieces to save your wife's life, I thought I'd see just about how much all that tall talk amounted to."

"Stop," said Kelly. "If I accept your terms, of course your motive is to kill me and get rid of me, though why you shouldn't choose a more merciful way of setting about it is more than I can say; however, if I accept and am killed, what about Amy? Am I to pay for one night's lodging with my life, or will you be kind to her and provide for her?"

"I will," answered Langham in the most matter-of-fact tones, "if you're killed; but I fancy you won't be; you look pretty strong. I'll look after her if you can't, anyhow."

"Then," said Kelly slowly, "I accept your terms."

"Don't run into this with your eyes shut," said Langham, "this won't be called child's play: you'll not walk three miles after I've done with you, nor yet three yards, nor half a yard."

"You'll find a snowdrift to throw me into somewhere handy, I don't doubt," said Kelly bitterly. "I don't suppose I shall feel the cold much or anything else when you've done with me, as you call it; you'll take care of that. The snow will do till the ground gets soft enough to dig. Be kind to Amy, that's all—you'll owe me *that*, I think, whatever I've done or left undone."

"A bargain?" said Langham unmoved.

"A bargain," was the answer; "do *your* share and

I'll not shrink from mine." Kelly spoke firmly, but could not quite emulate the other's coolness; the muscles of his mouth twitched.

Langham walked to the door and opened it. "Here," he called, "Hannah!"

A girl came along the passage. "Did you call, sir?" said she.

"Yes," said Langham, lifting Amy from the chair, and speaking very slowly and distinctly:

"This lady is my daughter; take care of her—every possible care—d'you hear? Light a fire upstairs, put her to bed, get her all she wants; when she comes to tell her she's perfectly safe and at home; if she asks for her husband say he's with me, and I'll see her presently."

"Stop," said Kelly huskily, "let me kiss her." He kissed her twice, and drew one of her soft tresses through his hand; then Langham gave her to the girl and closed the door.

"Ready?" he said.

"Quite," said Kelly.

III.

Langham threw the yard door wide open, he took the black snake from the table and curled it round his arm; he stepped into the yard, Kelly followed; the wind raged, the drifting snow flew in their faces in blinding masses. Langham opened the barn door, closed it against the bitter blast, struck a match, and kindled a stable lantern. Kelly leant against the closed door: his eyes were perfectly clear and fearless, but his lips were blue. Langham picked up a rope and fastened it to a beam just above their heads; then he turned to the other:

"Sure you don't want to be off your bargain?" he said; "it's not too late yet; you'd better see what these things can do where a man knows how to use them." He sent the long, lithe black line whirling round his head, and brought it against the side of the barn; the barn was rather old, and the wood a little soft, and the splinters of wood flew in Kelly's face.

He bit his lip and gave a faint laugh; his voice was quite steady, but in his eye was despair: "It strikes me," said he, "you'll have Amy on your hands for life; I suppose you wish that, and you probably reconcile the murder of a black sheep like myself to your conscience. Never mind, I'll forgive you, so long as you're good to my little wife—God bless her, and may He so deal with you as you deal with her."

Langham calmly hung the lantern on a nail. "If you're ready, I am," he said.

"One minute," said the other. "I don't know in the least how much endurance I have, or whether I shall funk this or not when it comes to the point; but look here, whatever I say after you've tied me up there don't you turn Amy out. I—I mean, if I *do* funk and ask you to take me down, don't listen to me. I seal this bargain *now*, you see, while I know what I'm about; don't take any notice of what I say afterwards."

Langham looked at him with a curious expression in his keen eyes. "Well, I'll be hanged," he said to himself. "Right you are."

Kelly threw off his coat, and unfastened the throat of his shirt.

Langham caught his arm. "You may have lied about having turned over a new leaf, but you've got grit," said he. "What you say about the last two years may be true, or it mayn't; but if a fellow who's as plucky and as unselfish as you are, and who loves his wife as you do my girl, hasn't got *some* good about him, I'll be shot—it's worth looking for, anyway. I only did this to try you."

"I thought you meant it," faltered Kelly; "didn't you?"

"Of course not," said the other, grinning sardonically; "do you take me for a murderer, you silly fellow?"

Kelly reeled, and dropped like a stone—fainting. When he recovered he found himself lying on the hay, and Langham kneeling by his side dashing the melted snow in his face to revive him.

"Forgive me, Kelly," he said kindly. "I know it was rather a brutal trick to play you; my heart smote me once or twice, and that's the truth, and I nearly laughed now and again, you were in such deadly earnest, but I wanted to see if you really would face a horrible death to save Amy's life."

Kelly laughed rather unsteadily. He had suffered so intensely during the past half-hour he could not treat the thing as coolly as did Langham.

"You are a great actor, Mr. Langham," said he; "I could have sworn you meant it. Will you keep Amy here to-night? Thank you. I'll go on now; is it straight ahead?"

"What I'll do for one I'll do for the other," said Langham; "come along. What an infernal wind." He slipped his arm through the young man's and led him to the house. He called the girl.

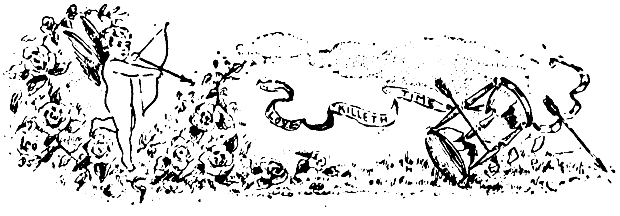
"How's my daughter now?" said he.

"She's better, sir," said the girl; "she's in bed, sir; and she's come to ask for where the gentleman was, sir. I've made her some arrowroot, and she's taking it."

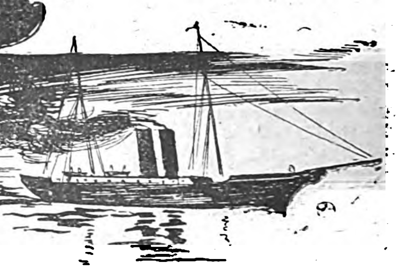
"All right," said Langham. "Tell Jane to look sharp with supper, and lay a plate for Mr. Kelly."

Kelly had sat down by the fire; he seemed half dazed, and leant his head on his hand. Langham silently handed him a pipe—his own panacea for every earthly ill—and tossed his tobacco pouch to his son-in-law. Neither spoke till supper was announced.

"I suppose I must forgive the pair of you," said Langham, rising "and find *you* something to do at the mills. If you get up to your old games, it's only giving you the sack; but I fancy you won't—anyhow, we'll try. Come to supper, Jack. Shake hands; we're friends, thanks to the Black Snake." Mary Bryan.



THE QUEEN OF NIGHT



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By HEADON HILL,

(*Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," "The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.*)

SUMMARY.

Gaston Vizard gives Sir Simon Crawshay an introduction to the agent of the vessel *Queen of Night*, in order that he may make a "special arrangement" with regard to the trip of his wealthy ward, Miss Challenor.

Dr. Zavertal calls on Vizard, and reports on the latest trip of the *Queen of Night*, during which the lives of three passengers, who were taken on board with a "special arrangement," had been lost. He also informs Vizard that a new captain will be wanted before the next cruise.

In Chapter I. Cyril Forrester receives his dismissal from the Flower Steamship Company for breaking the regulations while saving the life of Miss Aline Challenor. He applies to Nathan and Co., of Fenchurch Street, for the vacant command of the ocean yacht, *Queen of Night*.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW BERTH.

RESENTING the Jew's intrusive familiarity, I shook his hand off smartly. "The notice is all right," I began, "but I don't quite see——"

"What bithneth it is of mine," he interrupted, with a chuckle that was meant to be conciliatory. "Quite right, my dear sir; how should you see it? But perhaps you will understand better when you hear that I am Lemuel Nathan, of 315, Harp Alley, and the author of that little invitation. May I ask if it has any special interest for you?"

The fact of his being "Nathan and Co." certainly furnished a sufficient excuse for his having addressed me, for my clothes would have shown him that I was a ship's officer, and he might therefore have supposed me to be a possible applicant. Moreover, I had now had time to perceive in the written notice what I had missed in the newspaper advertisements—a chance of getting good employment, and I hastened to make amends for my curtness.

"Of course, that gives you every right to inquire," I said. "Yes, I hadn't had time to make up my mind when you spoke, but I think I was about forming the intention to come and see you about it."

"And so you shall, my dear young friend; you shall come over to my little offish at once," he replied. "It is close by, and we can talk in my private room more quietly than in a restaurant. Come, shall we strike while the iron is hot?"

He had taken instant advantage of my change of tone to slip his hand back to my coat-sleeve, and he was clutching it as if skippers for pleasure cruisers were so scarce that he was afraid of losing a valuable capture. His attitude, and the wheedling expression he tried to impart to his cunning old face were so ludicrous that I laughed as I said:

"Certainly, I will come—at once, if you like. I am probably a good bit more anxious to see if the billet will suit than you are, Mr. Nathan."

Still keeping his hand on my arm, he led me into the street, talking all the while, and I could not help thinking of the Jew crimps early in the century, so pleased did he seem with himself for having discovered me. This seemed so strange in face of the fact that trade was dull, and unemployed steamer captains as thick as blackberries, that I ventured to remark upon it as I went along.

"Ah, yes, my son; there are plenty of captains," he chuckled, "but not the right sort for the *Queen of Night*. I can read faces, and you are the only man I have seen in a fortnight likely to fill the bill. We want one with a dash and a style about him, to make the ship a little paradithe to the pathengers."

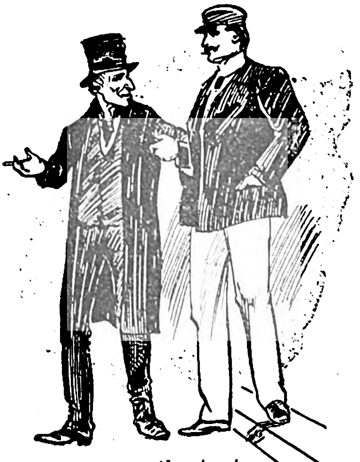
"You would have had more to choose from if you had advertised instead of sticking up a notice which only a few will see," I said.

"That is so my friend, but there are reasons," he replied. "The *Queen of Night* is now become very popular, and her late captain was a favourite. It might affect receipts if it were known that there had been a change."

We had now turned out of Fenchurch Street into a narrow thoroughfare with gloomy old-fashioned houses on either side—once the abodes of thriving citizens, but now let out in suites of offices from cellar to garret. Half-way down the alley my conductor stopped at a door on which among several others was fixed a brass plate bearing the inscription:

Ocean Steam-Yacht *Queen of Night*.
Nathan and Co., Agents.
(And at 420, Pall Mall.)

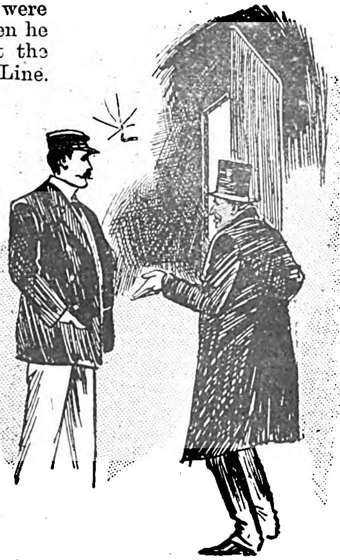
"This is only where the management of the ship is carried on; the passenger-booking is done at the West-end branch," Mr. Nathan explained, as he dived into the dark, musty-smelling entry, and proceeded to lead the way up a worm-eaten oak staircase to the first floor. Producing a key, he unlocked a door on the landing and invited me to enter. The room wherein I found myself was only some fifteen feet square, furnished with an ink-splashed table and three or four common chairs, and it had the appearance of being but an outer office, for there was a second door at the far end, leading, I presume, to an inner room of the same suite. The distempered walls were dirty and quite bare, except where a few tattered maps and charts were hanging.



He led me into the street.

My new acquaintance set a chair for me, and seating himself at the table, took a sheet of paper on which he jotted down notes of the answers I gave to his questions. My name, and the dates of my master's certificate and previous employments were duly recorded, and then he asked me why I left the service of the Flower Line.

"Because I broke a rule—left the bridge without being relieved," I replied, not caring to go into particulars unless he pressed for them. Somehow, I was averse from mixing up Aline in such a sordid matter as my discharge. I little knew then how much depended on his ignorance or knowledge of the episode of the rescue.



Invited me to enter.

My answer seemed to satisfy him; at any rate, he showed no curiosity about details. "Breach of regulashuns, eh?" he croaked. "Nothing very serious in that. Can you get me a letter from the company saying that, barring that, you have been an efficient officer and assiduous in your duties?"

I replied that I had no doubt I could. In fact, the directors had told me that they would do all in their power to aid my endeavours to obtain employment by testifying to my general capacity.

"Very well, Captain," he said, "I think it will be all serene, but I must consult with my partners. I am not alone in this business of entertaining the public on the briny waves. Wait here about half an hour, while I run out, and p'raps when I come back I shall have some news for you."

He handed me a *Daily Telegraph* to pass the time, and soon the sound of his shuffling footsteps died away on the stairs, leaving the room very still. You can be sure I didn't trouble that newspaper much. I was far too busy congratulating myself on the sudden turn my affairs seemed to have taken; and, eager as I was to see Aline, I rejoiced that my reluctance to go to her in the character of a cast-off had turned my step eastward in search of work before seeking her. *Now*, if this curious old Jew's "partners" proved complacent, I should be able to go to her full-blown "Captain Forrester," in command of a seven-thousand ton steamer, and with pockets in a fair way to be well lined.

Nothing as yet had been said about rate of pay, but I knew that these pleasure-cruiser people gave good wages. I began to have visions of Sir Simon Crawshay receiving me with open arms and giving his consent to our immediate union; and it was pleasant to think that indirectly I owed my promotion to Aline. Truly, I thought, the "little cherub that sits up aloft" had shifted the wind into the right quarter for me at last.

Thus busy was I with pleasant anticipations, when the sound of a slight cough caused me to start and look towards the door which Mr. Nathan had only partially closed. Standing there, half inside the room, a man was regarding me with an amused expression in a pair of the shrewdest eyes I have seen. He was spare of build, with close-cropped hair turning to iron-grey; but for all his slightness and years he gave me the impression that he would be an ugly customer if called on to take care of himself. His frame was wiry, and the hand that held open the door looked as hard as steel. There was something about the man to inspire trust and reliance even before he opened his mouth.

"Are you in charge of this office?" he asked when he had attracted my attention. He had a scarcely perceptible American accent, which would have escaped general notice.

I explained that I held no position there, but that Mr. Nathan, for whom I was myself waiting, would shortly return.

"Ah, it is not important," he said, coming a few paces into the room. "I was under the impression that the *Queen of Night* offices were in the West-end, and chancing to see the name on the door here as I passed, I thought I would get to the bottom of my error."

"You made no error; they have a branch in Pall Mall for booking purposes," I said. "This is where they do the victualling, buying stores, engaging officers, and all that sort of thing."

"I see; well, as my business, if any, has to do with the booking department, it is of no use to wait here," he said carelessly. "I haven't decided yet, but it's on the cards I may take a trip in this boat. I've just finished a big bit of work, and I am over here to recreate."

"You hail from the States?" I said.

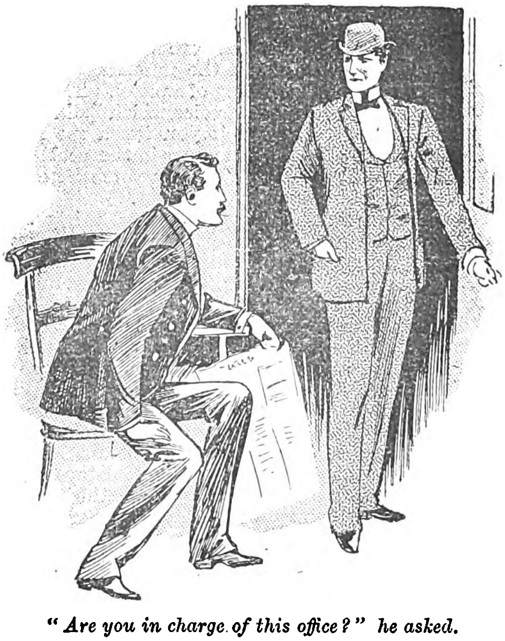
"So you've spotted the twang," he laughed pleasantly. "That is a sad blow, for I rather pride myself on not being branded too visibly with the Yankee trade mark. But then you have had a good deal of experience of Americans I should surmise, if you'll allow me to draw a deduction from your attire. Been in an Atlantic liner, eh?"

"I served in the Cunard some years ago," I said. Then, fearing that I had been rude, I added: "There is very little twang about a Southerner, and I should take you for one."

"Yes, I am from the Southern States," he replied. "My name is Kennard—Franklin Kennard. Possibly you have heard of it?"

I was obliged to confess that I had not.

"Oh, your knowledge of America and the Americans is not very deep-rooted after all," he said, with a curious smile. "Am I right in supposing that you are an officer of the *Queen of Night?* I ask because in that case we may have the pleasure of improving our acquaintance."

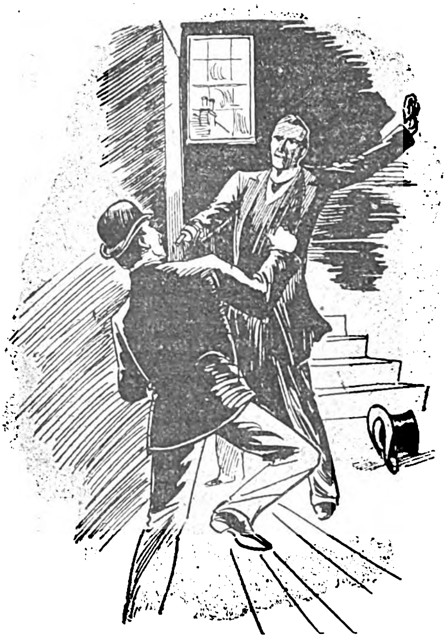


"Are you in charge of this office?" he asked.

"Not at present, though I may be. I am a candidate for the command of the vessel, and hope to get it," I replied.

"Well, then, good luck to you, and *au revoir*," he said, nodding farewell. "If I decide on the trip I will book at the West-end office, and shall hope to meet you on board."

He went out, leaving the door as he had found it—shut to, but not fastened—and the next moment I heard his footsteps briskly descending the stairs. He must have got some way down, to a place where there was a turn, when there reached me in quick succession a hurried cry of surprise, a smothered oath, and the unmistakable clicking sound that is made by the cocking of a pistol. The footsteps had ceased suddenly, and then a voice which I did not know said: "I've got you covered; if you touch me I shoot." To this there came the prompt answer in the cool tones of the American's voice: "You are alarming yourself needlessly; I am not concerned with you—at present."



"I've got you covered; if you touch me I shoot."

There followed silence for the space of thirty seconds, and then the footsteps went on again, only multiplied now by others ascending, while those going down, presumably those of the American, grew fainter and fainter, and finally died away. The episode had all passed so quickly that I had had no time for interference, or even to decide whether I ought to interfere; but now that it was over I was seized with curiosity as to the other party to that strange meeting on the stairs. It was not Nathan, for I should have recognised the voice. Was Kennard's interlocutor bound for the office in which I was seated, I wondered, or for one of the other suites on that or the higher floors.

I was not kept long in doubt. The footsteps passed by the door and came to an end further along the landing. I had started forward in my chair ready for emergencies, but finding that the gentleman who was so handy with his pistol was not coming my way I settled down again to wait for Nathan's return. Five minutes passed, and I was beginning to be impatient, when suddenly I experienced the sensation that some unseen person was watching me. Without vanity I may safely say that I do not know what "nerves" are, and I certainly was not alarmed by the feeling; but there it was all the same—the feeling that I was an object of interest to human eyes.

I got up and opened the door wide, but there was no one to be seen on the landing. Coming back into the room I saw that it was clearly impossible for anyone to have been looking at me through the window, which opened with a clear drop of twenty feet into the court below. The office itself obviously had no other tenant than myself. The instinct, however, remained strong upon me, and I gazed round the room vaguely in quest of its origin, till some strange attraction drew my eyes to a map that was hanging on the wall between the office and the inner room.

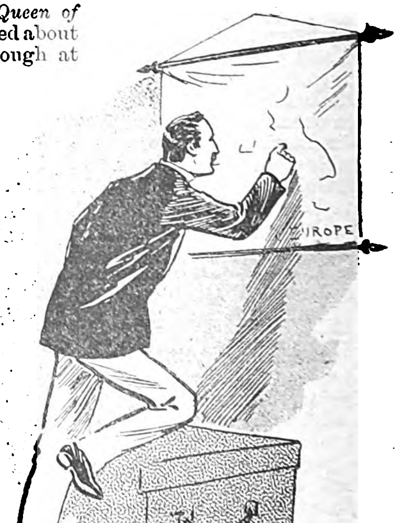
In the map I found, or thought I had found, the cause. Regarding me with a stony glare from two slits in the coloured portion of the canvas, I seemed to see a pair of steel-blue eyes which, as they met mine, were instantly withdrawn. I sprang forward and examined the map, which was a large scale one of Southern Europe. There were the slits right enough—fair and square in the middle of the Black Sea—but there were no eyes, and no place where they could have been. I poked my finger through the slits and came in contact with nothing but the plastered wall, which was smooth and solid, and apparently without a break.

I was about to lift the map to explore further, when my attention was arrested by the voice of Mr. Nathan from the doorway.

"Ah, Captain," he said, with the throaty chuckle that was one of his peculiarities, as he came in and seated himself at his desk: "Can't you keep from hankering after the tools of your trade, eh? Well, I think that you may take it as settled that you have the ship—provided the Flower people speak for you. If you'll call here to-morrow morning at ten I'll have the appointment all ship-shape and in order, and you won't have cause to quarrel with our terms."

My good luck drove all thought of those peeping eyes from my head, and I had already begun to believe myself mistaken. Away, too, flew all remembrance for the time of the American, Kennard; all that my mind was capable of holding just then was an intense desire to get away to the West-end so that Aline could share my joy. So profuse was I in my acknowledgments that the little Jew shook his yellow wrinkled hand at me in a sort of fantastic deprecation.

"Keep your pretty speeches for the pathengers, my boy," he wheezed. "We want all our stock of sweets for the pathengers of the *Queen of Night*." And he rolled about and laughed as though at some huge joke visible only to himself.



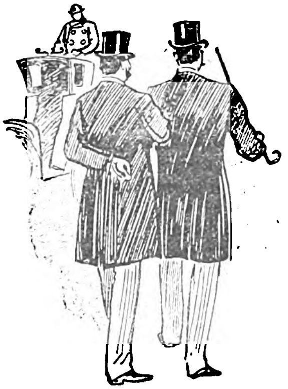
I sprang forward and examined the map.

CHAPTER III.

SIR SIMON'S NEWS.

On leaving Mr. Nathan's office in Harp Alley I went straight back to the more palatial domicile of the Flower Line, in Leadenhall Street, and had a brief but satisfactory interview with the General Manager. Instructions had been given by the board that I was to be treated liberally in the matter of references, and when I left I was in possession of a letter which vouched for my competency in such glowing terms that I put away all further doubt about getting the berth. I was as good as captain of the *Queen of Night*.

Passing out into the street through the great swing-doors, I felt, in homely phrase, as though I trod on air; but as I was looking around for a smart hansom to take me westward, a trivial incident—at least, I thought it trivial then—served to bring me down to earth. Two well-dressed men were standing on the kerb some few paces away, and one of them—the shorter—turned and looked at me. I instantly experienced the same kind of sensation that I had felt in Nathan's office, and, strangely enough, I saw that the man's eyes were the exact counterpart of those which I had seen, or thought I had seen, gazing at me from the slit in the map. Their owner looked away again immediately, and, hooking his arm in that of his tall companion, walked away towards Cornhill.



Walked away towards Cornhill.

In another minute I was bowling along in a hansom in the same direction, and soon passed the pair strolling leisurely, and engaged in earnest conversation. If there had been any budding idea in my mind of a real connection between the incident at Nathan's and the incident in the street, it was quickly dismissed by the men's demeanour. They evinced no interest in surroundings, and, on looking back after the cab had passed, I saw that, even if the eyes had been identical, they were not sufficiently interested in me to follow. The two gentlemen were continuing their walk, and, as I looked, turned into a well-known bank.

"I am a bit jumpy to-day," I said to myself. "If I didn't know to the contrary I should think I had taken the proverbial drop too much last night. The interview with those board-room bogies and the process of getting the sack must have upset me more than I thought."

Pulling myself together, I once more dismissed the incident of the eyes as too ridiculous for serious consideration. As the cab sped along the Embankment I gave myself up to pleasant anticipations of the coming meeting, and by the time it drew up in Grosvenor Square I had forgotten everything but Aline—Aline, the sweetheart whom I had wrested from the sea. But when I had paid my fare and stood before the house my spirits received something of a damper, and I realised for the first time that even unprejudiced persons might see presumption, or what was worse, self-interest, in my courtship. That stately mansion, with its lordly frontage and imposing air of wealth, was hardly the sort of abode in which merchant captains were wont to woo their brides.

However, "faint heart ne'er won fair lady," and I wasn't going to turn tail and run away from brown stucco and grand brass door fittings. I mounted the steps and rang the bell, hardly decided till the door was opened and a pompous butler stood before me whether to ask for Aline or her guardian. Then I went full steam ahead, and inquired plump and straight whether Miss Challenor was at home.

The reply was a disappointment: "Miss Challenor is at Brighton, sir, and does not return till early next week. After that, I believe, she goes abroad for some time."

"Is Sir Simon in?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, will you please to step this way."

He showed me into a small room on the ground floor, and went to take my card to the baronet. While he was gone I tried to come to a conclusion as to what I should do, and I decided to be guided by circumstances. If Sir Simon was friendly I would broach the subject of my love for Aline; if the reverse, I would wait and consult with Aline herself before taking a course which would compromise her and cause unpleasantness between her and her guardian.

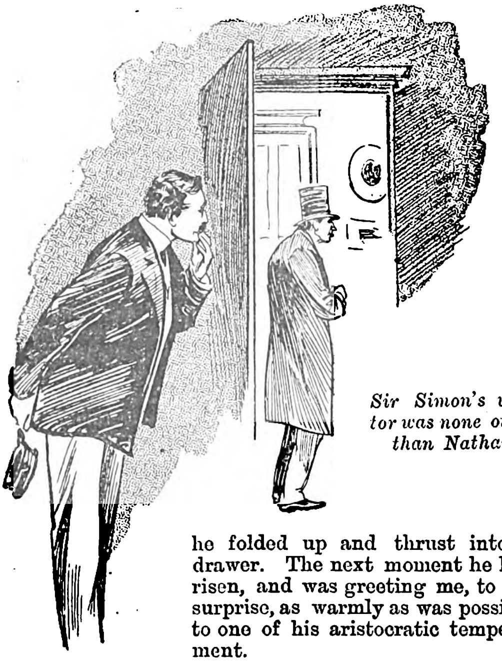
The butler had not closed the door, and from where I stood I could see part of the hall and the foot of the grand staircase. In about two minutes I heard people coming down the stairs, and soon the butler came into view, apparently escorting some previous caller whom he was about to show to the front door at the conclusion of a visit. I was so placed that I could only see passers-by as they traversed the last two steps of the stairs, and the butler was out of my vision in a second. Without feeling any special interest in the visitor—except that I suppose in a vague sort of way a lover's jealousy made me curious about *all* visitors to that house—I waited for him to go by. There must have been an interval of half-a-dozen steps between the two, for the second descender of the stairs came with the shambling gait of age, and when he did appear was longer in my sight than the manservant. Hence there was no shadow of doubt this time as to the reality of the coincidence that startled me.

Sir Simon's visitor was none other than Nathan, the Jew owner of the "Queen of Night," my new employer.

I hurried to the room door and looked after the retreating figure as it passed out of the house. He had his back to me now, but what I saw only confirmed my recognition of the leering, wizened face. He wore on his head a regular three-decker of a top hat—a piece of head-gear which, from the peculiarity of its construction, had specially attracted my attention in the city.

There was no time for conjecture or surmise as to the nature of his business with Sir Simon. The butler approached me with a request to follow him to his master's presence, and, leading me up the broad staircase, he ushered me into a snug apartment, half smoking-room and half library.

Sir Simon was sitting at an escritoire, occupied in blotting a counterfoil in his cheque-book, which, upon my entrance, he folded up and thrust into a drawer. The next moment he had risen, and was greeting me, to my surprise, as warmly as was possible to one of his aristocratic temperament.

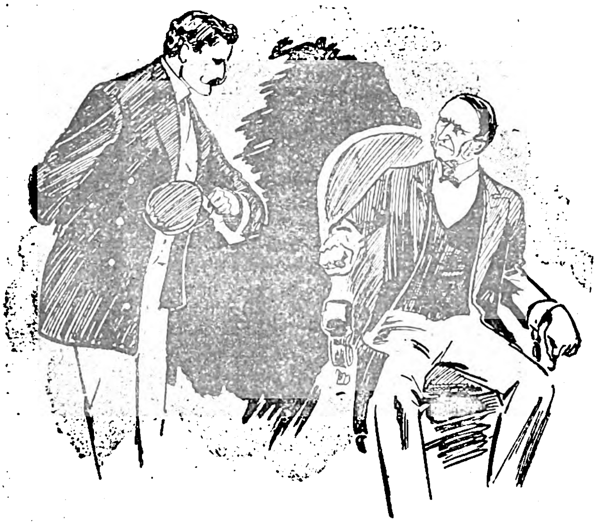


Sir Simon's visitor was none other than Nathan.

"Quite a pleasure, I am sure, Mr. Forrest—or Forrester, was it?" he said, shaking me by the hand, and showing his false teeth in one of his made-to-order smiles. "Sit down and take one of these cigars. Have you been fishing any more young ladies out of the sea lately?"

I responded as well as I could to his intended civility, and then asked after Aline's health without telling him that I knew of her absence from town. As there was no chance of my seeing her then he might as well take my visit as meant for himself, I thought.

"My poor ward is very far from well, I regret to say," was the disquieting reply that set my heart beating. "She has never really got over the shock of her sudden immersion. I have sent her down to Brighton in the hope that the change might benefit her, but it has had the contrary effect. My sister, Mrs. Beauchamp, who is with her, reports that she is in a very low state indeed."



"She has promised to be my wife."

This was grievous news, and I was at a loss to understand it. Though Aline had lost consciousness in the water, she was to all appearances perfectly well the next day, and during the remainder of her stay on the *Dahlia* she had continued the picture of radiant health. I expressed my deep concern, and asked for her Brighton address so that I might run down and pay my respects in person.

The request was no sooner made than I perceived the real reason of the baronet's affability in his knowledge that Aline was inaccessible to me. He promptly refused to give the address, and there was an ugly sneer in his tone as he did so.

"That, I fear, is quite out of the question, seeing that you are the very last person she ought to see," he said. "Why, the sight of you would recall the occurrence which is the cause of her nervous prostration, and which it is desirable that she should forget."

"She won't do that," I answered sharply, for his latest demeanour nettled me. "And look here, Sir Simon," I added, stung to a premature declaration by the evil smile with which he received my answer, "I can give you a very good reason why Miss Challoner will not be so forgetful. You may as well know it first as last; she has promised to be my wife."

I believe, and always shall believe, that this was the first intimation he had had that there was anything between Aline and myself, though others think that he had suspected it, and had adopted the measures presently to be disclosed because of that suspicion. From his point of view there was cause enough without that, and at least his manner was that of a man completely taken by surprise. Sir Simon Crawshay was as wicked a scoundrel as any who will appear in these pages, but he had not the professional subtlety of some whom we are about to meet. He started forward, flushing deeply, then sank back in his chair, laughing outright.

"My dear sir," he sniggered at length, "it is a pity you are not in the Royal Navy instead of in the Merchant Service. You would be just the man to lead forlorn hopes and cutting-out expeditions. Do you know that my ward is an heiress, entitled to something like a quarter of a million on attaining her majority?"

I confess I was staggered, but I replied boldly: "I did not know it. If I had been aware of Miss Challenor's great fortune I should never have courted her. As it is, the knowledge comes too late to make any difference, for we have plighted our troth."

"And you are willing to take the quarter of a million thrown in, just as a trifling extra detail," he sneered, implying that I knew of Aline's wealth all along. "Come, Mr. Forrester, you must see that I can never give my consent to such an engagement. I should fail in my duty as Miss Challenor's guardian if I listened for one moment to your proposal. I——"

"Wait a minute," I interrupted; "I have had promotion since we met on the *Dahlia*. I am now captain, and——"

"It makes no difference; pray spare me the interesting particulars," he interposed in turn. "No promotion in your rather obscure branch of a precarious profession would entitle you to aspire to my ward's hand. When do you go to sea again?"

Wondering at the abrupt question, I named the 15th of the month, which was the day Nathan had mentioned as the probable date of sailing.

"The 15th," he repeated, "Well, then, there'll be no harm in my telling you Miss Challenor's future movements; it may save you a lot of trouble in hanging about here. She remains at Brighton till the 14th, and on the following day—the date of your sailing, remember—she leaves England for six weeks. There can thus be no chance of your meeting, although you may perhaps see her through a telescope as you go down Channel. On the 15th my ward starts on a pleasure cruise for the benefit of her health, in the ocean yacht *Queen of Night*."

(*To be continued.*)

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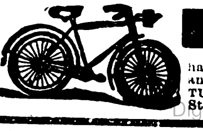

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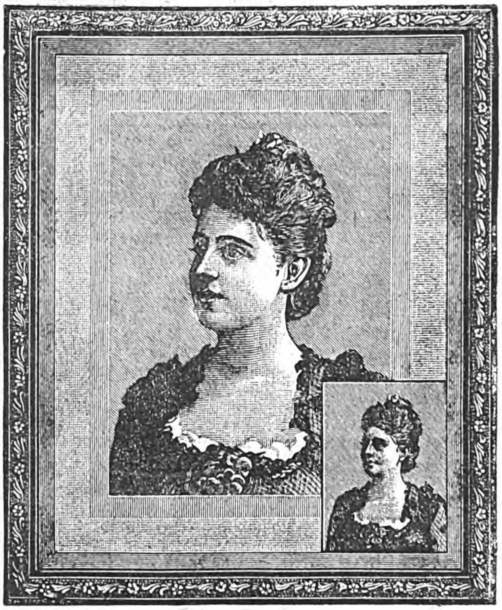

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EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 352. FOR WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 28TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

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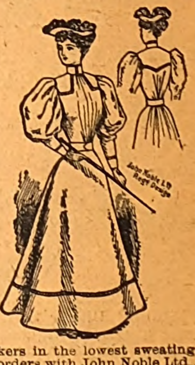

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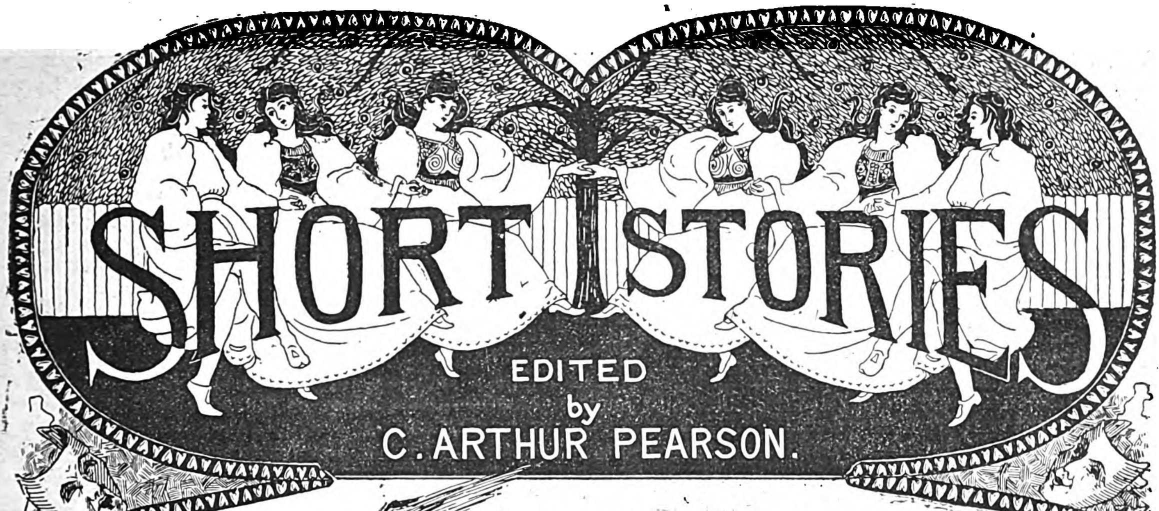

SHORT STORIES

EDITED
by
C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 352.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending September 28th, 1895.

ROMANCE
LOVE
WAR
ADVENTURE
HUMOUR
PATHOS

ACCIDENT OR DESIGN?

TWICE a year I visit France as buyer for a large importing house in London. In Marseilles I stop at a rather unpretentious hotel off La Cannebière. Jacques, the head waiter, when he was a *garçon* in a Paris café, once helped me out of a scrape; but that is not what I want to narrate now.

Early one evening, a soft twilight following a day of rain and clouds, I seated myself in a quiet corner of the upper balcony. I had had a busy, tiresome day, and was glad to be alone. My business at Marseilles was completed, and it was a relief to be free from the Oriental merchants with their oppressive salaams and calm mendacity. Thank Heaven, to-morrow I could set my face towards the land where human nature even was not inlaid and carved and veneered out of all semblance to itself.

I was gazing at the cosmopolitan, picturesquely dressed people coming into our quiet little street from the gay Cannebière. One by one the lights began to twinkle, and the moon rose with its face so solemnly white and expressive of eternal silence framed in the mystery of space, yet breaking into soft smiles and dimples as it glanced into the rippling waters of the old harbour beyond.

Suddenly the gas was lighted in a room behind me. A party of three entered, and seated themselves round the table. There were two men, both fine-looking fellows, and a pretty woman. In the careless glance of an indifferent stranger I saw this, and looked away while they studied the *menu* or chatted.

But my attention was again called to the room, when the slight dark man of the party rose and threw up the window a few inches. The other took advantage of his companion's absence, it would seem, to throw a glance full of love at his pretty *vis-à-vis*.

The dark man turned with a nervous rapidity to the table, and must have seen the look that still burnt in the blue eyes of the big blonde fellow. But, though he glanced carelessly at the two faces before him, his expression did not change. The pretty woman, I fancied, turned pale and trembled a little.

Somehow I was fascinated by this group, and my whole nervous system being relaxed after the strain of the past few days, I fell into an imaginative mood unusual to me. "Here is love," thought I, "trying to draw this fine handsome fellow and this pretty little woman together, while this dark Mephistopheles sneers at their love or jealousy stalks a tragedy to their happiness."

But these people looked very matter-of-fact, in spite of my imaginings, as they ate the supper before them. They chatted quietly, eating and sipping their wine with leisurely comfort. The dark man finished first, and pushed his chair back from the table.

"*Parbleu!* Mignonne, I think it would be well for me to get shaved before we go to the play. I have had

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no time to think of it, even to-day. What sayest thou?" and he playfully seized her hand and drew it over his cheek.

"It is not very rough; it looks very well," answered the little woman.

"Ah, but it will be rough and unpleasant by to-morrow, and then I shall have no time. It is strange," said he, turning to the other man with a peculiar glitter in his eyes, "that of late I cannot handle a razor myself without wishing to cut my throat, or someone else's," and he laughed maliciously, as his companions, especially the little woman, looked uncomfortable.

"I shall return by the time you and madame have finished supper. I beg that you will not hurry," he continued, with what seemed to me mocking politeness.

"You will not mind waiting here with Monsieur Steinert, Mignonne?" he asked, turning to the little woman with that same mocking tone. "Perhaps you would like to sit outside on the *galérie;* but no, the wind blows damp from the sea there. Dost feel it, Mignonne? Ah, thou art in a draught, my little one." And though the pretty woman protested, in a rather subdued way, I thought, that she was very comfortable, he rose, and, with a strange smile on his face, closed the thick wooden shutters with a bang.

This brought me to my senses. I realised that I had been unconsciously playing the part of an eavesdropper. I took my chair, and, going round the corner of the house, seated myself on the other side.

In a few moments I became aware of stealthy footsteps stealing along the silent piazza. A chill crept through my blood, and with it a horrible suspicion. Only a few days before a stranger had been murdered by a mysterious assassin who stole on his victims in the dark. An Englishman and a German had so far been the choice of this silent murderer.

Scarcely daring to breath, I peered round the corner. I saw a man now, motionless before the closed shutters of the room. The moon was scurrying along behind a pile of black clouds. It was quite dark, and at first I could barely see his figure. But in another instant a small ray of light fell across his face. I know not whether the expression it revealed was real or the grotesque painting of light and shade, but I saw what seemed like the grinning features of an enraged demon. Only for a moment he stood there; and then, with muttered words, he replaced something in the blind and stole softly away.

As he passed through the door at the far end of the piazza it shut with a loud bang. Something fell with a gentle noise to the piazza, and rolled near my corner. The moon passed out from its grim curtain, and I could just see the small something; I picked it up. By the light of a match I saw that it was a knot of wood, painted green on both ends. I rose, and, walking to the shutters of the little supper-room in which I had been so interested, I saw a small hole in the upper part of one of them. The knot just fitted it. As I was about to replace it I saw into the room. The fair man was holding the woman's hand; as he relinquished it he kissed it passionately. They both looked very sad.

I turned away from the window, filled with a strange sympathy for this pair. I did not care to sit longer on the piazza. I felt oppressed and chilled. As I stepped into the hall I met the trio of my thoughts. They were going out—to the theatre, I suppose—and the dark man seemed the easiest and was assuredly the most talkative of the three.

"Ah, Jacques," said I, as I encountered the head waiter at the door of the café, "who are those three people passing into the street from the private entrance?"

Jacques glanced into the hall as the three passed out.

"That is Monsieur Malhomme and his wife. Do you not know them? They are *pensionnaires* here. But you are here so little, monsieur, that I suppose you have not seen them. Besides, they do not eat in the café; they have one of the little rooms above. It is more private for madame, who does not like to be stared at so much—so monsieur her husband says to me."

"And the fair gentleman—who is he?" I asked again, with persistent curiosity.

"Oh, that is Monsieur Steinert, a German scientist—an inventor. Monsieur Malhomme is the greatest aeronaut of the day, and madame the most daring parachute jumper of the whole world," said Jacques magnificently, glancing round the tiny room and sweeping his hand in a graceful curve.

I knew Jacques well, and saw that this was an interesting subject. Questions were superfluous, for Jacques could not now be stopped from telling all he knew. He would tell no more—Jacques was that rare being of a higher life, a conscientious gossip.

"Yes," he continued, "Monsieur Malhomme is the greatest of aeronauts, and madame is incomprehensible, superb; her courage is of the most marvellous. Monsieur Steinert has made some improvement on the parachute, that makes it *absolument parfaite,*" said the magnificent Jacques, with another of his sweeping gestures. "It is safe—there is no danger with this parachute. It cannot fail to open and bring madame safely to the ground."

I was now eating my horse-steak—or whatever it might be—but which Jacques politely called "*bifstec,*" and listened comfortably to my talkative Gaul.

"Madame gives another exhibition with this parachute the most perfect, to-morrow. It will be the last in France. Monsieur must go and see it. It would not do to miss a sight so wonderful. All Marseilles will go."

Jacques now masked his smiles in a Jovian frown, as he strode with measured steps and imposing grandeur towards another guest seeking a seat in the well-filled café.

"Does not monsieur think madame very beautiful?" he inquired, returning to my table, where he could keep his eye turned in all directions. "She has all her life been an acrobat, but she is very modest and very good."

Jacques sighed and shrugged his shoulders. "Monsieur is jealous, they say; but it is not madame's fault if she is pretty, and Monsieur Steinert makes eyes at her—as I have myself seen." He looked mysterious. "I see many things, monsieur; but I am a philosopher, and take no notice of these little affairs, except to sympathise always with the heart." Here Jacques had to leave me again, and for once I was spared the polite but rather elaborate description of his philosophy.

The next day rose like a flushed nymph out of a bath of dew. It was delightfully sunny and warm, with a fresh exhilarating air. I drew a long breath as I stepped briskly along La Cannebière. I was following the crowd, and that meant all Marseilles. Its rather motley population was bent on seeing the balloon-ascent and the parachute-jumper.

The trains were crowded; and I felt as joyous and ready to run as a lot of wild youths who had been confined in the close apartment with me, when we alighted at St. Louis. This was the suburb of Marseilles where the ascent was to take place.

We were too early; and, as I had never visited St. Louis before, I spent the time in walking about its busy streets. I had not gone very far before I encountered Jacques; I was glad, as the most lonely place in the world to me is in the midst of thousands of my own kind, if I am a stranger and friendless.

Jacques was always more talkative than a barber, and more lissome than a contortionist, and to-day he was—Jacques. His eyebrows talked, his nostrils talked, and the tips of his ears talked; his legs, feet, arms, hands talked. I enjoyed my cigar all the more from the fact that I was not obliged to listen attentively to Jacques' monologue. He enjoyed his little speeches, and fancied himself, I often thought, declaiming to a large audience instead of one quiet middle-aged individual.

"Ah!" cried Jacques, drawing a long breath, "there is madame!" and he pointed to a lady seated in a carriage before a small house. It was the parachute jumper. She looked bright and flushed, and eagerly kissed an old man who came forth to greet her.

"It is her father," said Jacques. "She lived here once. See the old father, how proud! He, too, was an acrobat."

The old man entered the carriage. As he opened the door we passed before it and saw that, besides madame, there was another occupant. It was the German scientist—Monsieur Steinert. Jacques shook his head as the carriage crove off.

"That is very indiscreet," he said.

We followed the miserable shambling horse attached to the carriage, as it meandered down a widened road. We soon found ourselves in a wide open field among thousands of curiosity-feeders like ourselves.

The great balloon was inflated, and tugging at its moorings as though the breath within animated it with a savage restlessness.

The scene which followed was characteristically French. The aeronaut made a little speech. He described the parachute and the improvements invented by Monsieur Steinert, who thereupon had to make his bow and was duly applauded. Then madame was presented, and they cheered till the crowd of yelling Frenchmen looked like a Paris mob of mad communists. Even her aged father had to be brought forward, and he bowed his old stage bows proudly, as he held his daughter's hand.

"How can he smile?" I said to Jacques, "when his daughter is about to risk meeting a horrible death?"

My philosopher shrugged his shoulders, turned his elbows inward and the upturned palms of his hands outward, arched his eyebrows into inverted V's, and said: "But she is brave and beautiful; he is proud—her father. But oh! see! there she goes, *la brave madame!*" And Jacques nearly dislocated every joint in his body as he threw kisses at the parachute jumper fast rising into the clouds.

The balloon ascended very rapidly, and, it seemed to me, in almost a straight line. Even after it had reached a great height, it scarcely appeared to drift at all.

We watched it with that keen relish which always makes a real danger horribly delightful when our own gods are not threatened. Gradually the waving handkerchiefs of the balloonists became mere specks, then passed out of our vision.

I don't know whether the feeling of solemnity which stole over me oppressed any other breast with its uncanny weight; possibly it did, for the wild cheering ceased, and a strange stillness eloquent of expectation followed. With a unity of sentiments that was like the stringing of several notes into a sympathetic chord, we watched for the event of the day. At last it occurred.

A long-drawn intense "Ah!" announced that madame had jumped from the balloon.

Like a bit of vivid scarlet in the clear sunshine, she sped towards us with indescribable rapidity. The parachute had not yet opened.

Our nerves were strained to a dry fierce tension as we watched the shooting figure dart downward. Would the parachute never open?

My heart thumped as madly with excitement as must that in the bosom of the woman flashing like a meteorite through the air.

"But," I inwardly panted, "the parachute will soon open and relieve the horrible feeling of being hurled through space at that tremendous rate! She will soon steady into a comparatively floating motion—a gradual descent!"

But alas! seconds shot by, and the parachute was still closed.

Great Heavens! would it never open? A chill of horror swept over us; we craned our necks, we held our breaths, our pulses throbbed, our hearts knocked loudly, our lips grew dry, and yet the parachute had not opened! Was it hours, minutes, or seconds that we watched? The clock could not measure the time; only the mental dial which writes his hours in furrows and grey hairs marked it on our souls.

A deep groan distracted us for an instant. It came from Monsieur Steinert, who, with pallid face and wildly staring eyes, was gazing fixedly at the figure above us.

Ah, madame's old father! I had forgotten him till I saw him fall on his knees, his blue and trembling lips moving in prayer. His tear-dimmed eyes gazed terror-stricken upwards—only a little way now, only a little way, and yet the parachute had not opened.

With a savage bound, the German inventor sprang past me towards the spot where she must——

But I turned away, cold in my blood, faint and dizzy.

Then a cry of horror rose from the crowd now surging towards——! but I could not look, and staggered rather than walked to the station.

As a frightful shriek rent my ears, I looked backwards and saw the maddened German dash himself forward on something scarlet that was stretched on the ground, while the old father, dazed and half paralysed, still knelt and mumbled his prayers. Then the crowd closed round that bit of scarlet raiment, and I saw no more.

Had the aeronaut—my dark Mephistopheles of the night before—tampered with the parachute? Had he taken this means to revenge himself on his wife and her lover? Who can tell? I never could, though my suspicions do not sleep.

Therèse M. Randall.

GOLDEN STAR

. . A ROMANCE . .

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

The prologue tells of the bridal of Vilcaroya and Golden Star, in the Sanctuary of the Sun in Cuzco, on the eve of the Spanish invasion and the fall of the Inca empire. It has been prophesied that when the sceptre of the Incas shall be grasped by the hand of one who has been dead, and is alive again, the ancient glories of their empire shall be restored. Golden Star, one of the sacred Virgins of the Sun, kneels at the foot of the alter and offers herself as the bride of him who will fulfil the prophecy. Vilcaroya swears for love of her to dare the ordeal. On the night of their bridal they are carried away to their secret resting-place, and at the same time immense treasures are taken out of Cuzco, and hidden against the time of their awakening. Professor Martin Lamson brings back to England an unique mummy which he has found in a walled-in cave in a remote valley among the Cordilleras of the Peruvian Andes. A friend of his, Dr. Laurens Djama, a very clever physiologist, is present while he is unpacking it. He shows it to be entirely different from all other specimens of Inca embalming, and expresses the conviction that it might be possible to restore it to animation. The Professor consents to the experiment being made, and the mummy is removed to Djama's laboratory. In a week he sends for him and shows him his mummy alive and sleeping quietly in bed. The Professor is so overcome by the sight that he falls fainting by the bedside. After his recovery they watch by turns till the Inca wakes. The Professor learns that he is the Vilcaroya of the legend. He asks for Golden Star, and they have to tell him that she has been dead for over three hundred years. He promises them that if they will restore her, too, to life he will give them treasures such as they have never dreamed of. He rapidly regains health and strength, and learns the marvels of the new world in which he has awakened, chiefly under the guidance of Ruth, the Doctor's sister, and six months later all preparations have been made, and the party, including Ruth, embark for Peru.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER V.

Captain Hartness.

The voyage from Southampton to Colon in the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company's Ship *Orinoco* was a revelation of never-ceasing marvels to the ever-wondering eyes of Vilcaroya. The illimitable expanses of sky and ocean that opened out when the land had faded from sight, the ever-changing face of the sea, the ever-present miracle of the great ship ploughing its way with invisible and resistless force through the parting waves that swirled along her sides hour after hour and day and night without rest or pause, all these and a hundred other details which his ever-observant eyes discovered were to him a series of miracles wrought by some new power that had come into the world since his eyes had closed upon it.

The green, English-looking shores and slopes of Barbadoes, the rock-bound coast and forest-clad mountains of Hayti, and the verdant hills and valleys of Jamaica were all so many wonderlands to him, yet so strong was the habit of self-control which he had by this time acquired, that none of the fellow-passengers whom he met daily and hourly on the quarter-deck and in the saloon could have guessed, however remotely, at the fearful secret hidden behind the impassive mask of his comely, high-bred features, or ever felt the slightest suspicion that a re-incarnate ghost from the grave was so unobtrusively living their easy, idle, steamboat life with them.

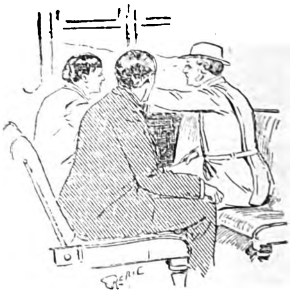
So Colon was reached and the Isthmus was crossed. While they were going over in the train the Professor pointed out the wilderness of ruin that lay on both sides of the land, and told him briefly the history and inception and failure of the great canal scheme. Vilcaroya was silent for a few moments, then he looked up and said in a low tone:

"I will give you the gold to finish it with, if you like, when you have given Golden Star back to me."

It was the first time he had alluded to his hidden treasures since the Professor had asked him about them some five months before. Djama, who was sitting by, heard what he said. He looked at the Professor with raised eyebrows, and murmured:

"That would be a great deal of gold even for you to give. Don't you think so, Lamson?"

"However much it is I will give it," said Vilcaroya, in the same tone. "No price will be too great for me to pay for that I wish for."



The Professor pointed out the wilderness of ruin.

"It will be a matter of millions," said Djama that night to the Professor, as they were smoking their cigars under the electric light in the plaza in front of the Grand Hotel in Panama. Vilcaroya had gone to bed early, as he always did, in accordance with the ancient habits that he had not yet thrown off. Ruth was walking between them, listening with feelings that were not altogether pleasurable to their discussion of the prospective wealth which they expected to receive from the hands of the Inca. Her interest in him was an entirely human one, tinged strongly with romance, but completely free from the slightest admixture of cupidity, while theirs seemed to become more and more purely mercenary the nearer they got to the scene on which they believed their hopes would be realised.

"Don't you think, Laurens," she said, after a little pause, "that there is really something more than a mere mercenary interest in this? You never seem to me to realise all that it means to poor Vilcaroya himself.

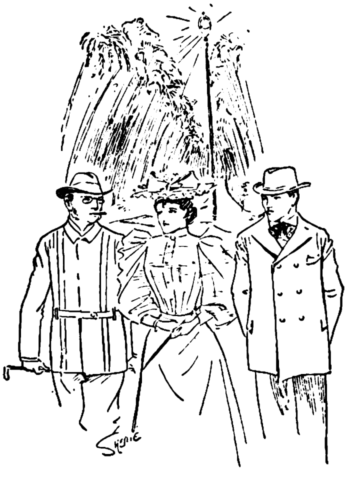
What a marvellous fate has befallen him; what hopes and fears must lie before him; and what great projects must be revolving themselves in his mind although he says so little about them. Surely the deliverance of these poor fellow-countrymen of his from the degradation that the Spaniards and their descendants have thrown them into, and even that dream of his of the restoration of the throne of his ancestors, is of vastly greater importance than any benefit that you and Professor Lamson may derive from it. Of course, I know this is very important to you, and it ought to be, but surely——"

"My dear Ruth," said her brother, taking hold of her hand and pulling it through his arm, "I am very glad you have just said what you have done, because it gives me an opportunity of saying something else that I have been wanting to say for some time. I am afraid you have been allowing yourself to drift into an interest in our friend that might lead to somewhat awkward complications. Of course, I don't mean to imply for a moment that you have any intention of falling in love with him, or anything of that sort; that would be something altogether too absurd, even for imagination; but what I mean is that this man is going into Peru with credentials, so to speak, which the descendants of his people will be perfectly prepared to recognise as supernatural.

"The power that he will wield over them when he once gets into communication with them will be simply illimitable. It will be the power of a God rather than of a man. They will go to death for him at a word, and if he is really capable of unearthing the lost treasures and rediscovering the gold and emerald mines, he will command a money-power that will enable him to carry fire and sword not only through Peru but perhaps the whole of South America. You know that more than seventy-five per cent. of the so-called armies of the South American Republics are almost wholly of Indian blood. They hate the white men, and they have never forgotten what the Spaniards did to their ancestors two or three hundred years ago. As a matter of fact, we are taking a firebrand into South America, and the result may be a blaze-up of the whole continent.

"Now, we want nothing to do in all this. We are not going to start revolutions and run the hazard of battle for the sake of restoring the throne of the Incas. Our business is simply to get as respectable a share as we can of the treasures that we shall have enabled him to recover, and then to get ourselves and our gold back to England with as little trouble and risk as possible. Don't you think that is a fair statement of the case, Lamson?"

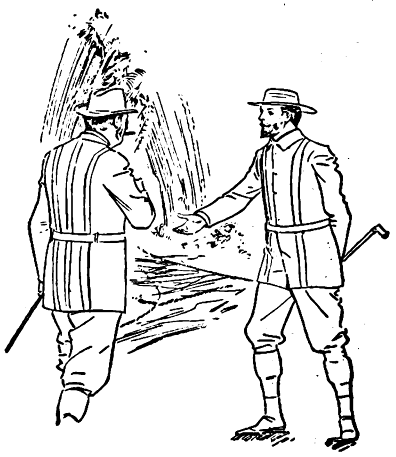
"Yes, certainly I do," said the Professor, "granted also that I can pick up the material I want for my own reconstruction of the lost Inca civilisation; and that I have every hope of being able to do before the catastrophe occurs. After that, well, of course, the somewhat lurid picture you have painted will illustrate a most interesting page in contemporary history, but I really can't see that we shall be justified in figuring it."



Smoking their cigars under the electric light in the plaza.

"Well," said Ruth, a trifle sharply, "I suppose I must admit the worldly wisdom of what you say, but that's not my view of the case. If I may speak plainly, you have brought this man back out of the grave for your own purposes, perfectly fair and laudable in themselves, I admit; but still, I think there is something more than that to be considered. You have made yourselves responsible, not only to him, but, as I believe, to God and the whole world, for the life that you, Laurens, have recreated in some mysterious way, in defiance of all the known laws of nature. If he, as you say, proves to have the power of setting a whole continent in a blaze, and perhaps sacrificing thousands and thousands of lives, remember that, even if you have not made the torch, you have given him the power to make it and light it.

"You know there is something more than the convenience of two or three private individuals to be considered when one deliberately interferes with the order of nature. If it had not been for you this man would have been dead, or perhaps I should rather have said, he would have remained dead. You will probably restore this wife of his to life as well. You know, because you and Professor Lamson have told me yourselves, that the Indians of Peru still believe that a descendant of the Incas is ruling somewhere among the unknown valleys of the interior. They have never given up the hope of a restoration of their empire, and here you are bringing back to them one of the old Incas themselves, and you have just said they will receive him almost as a God, as a king sent to them straight from the Mansions of the Sun, and yet you talk as lightly about setting a whole continent on fire as you would about restoring a lost heir to his estates."



Came striding across a brightly lit patch.

Her brother was saved from the possibly difficult task of making a satisfactory reply to this little lecture by a diversion as unexpected as it was in some respects unwelcome. A tall, well-set-up figure, dressed in a Norfolk jacket suit of khaki and wearing a Terai hat, came striding across a brightly-lit patch on the asphalt with a hand outstretched. It stopped in front of the Professor, who was a pace or two in front of the others.

"Hullo, Lamson! what on earth are you doing in Panama again? I thought you had gone home to spend at least three years sorting out your treasures and writing another of those big books of yours about them. Where are you off to—down the Coast? Oh, I beg your pardon, I thought you were alone."

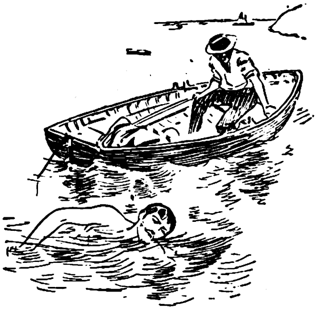
At this moment Ruth and her brother stopped about a yard from the Professor. An introduction was, of course, inevitable.

"Captain Hartness—Miss Ruth Djama, Dr. Laurens Djama, two friends of mine who are going with me—ah—yes—down the Coast."

As Ruth bowed and acknowledged the introduction she looked up under her eyelashes and caught a glimpse of a strong manly face with a rather fair moustache and close-clipped beard, a straight rather delicately-shaped nose, a pair of keen blue eyes under somewhat heavy eyebrows, a good deal darker than the moustache and beard. Later on, when she had an opportunity of revising her first impressions, she came to the conclusion that Captain Francis Hartness, late of Her Majesty's Light Dragoons, later still of His Highness the Khedive's forces, and presently unattached wanderer over the face of the earth, was about the manliest man she had ever seen.

"And what might you be doing here?" said the Professor, when the orthodox greetings had been got over. "I thought you were off lion hunting in Central Africa by this time."

"Well, I did think of going there, as I told you last time I saw you, but I've heard on the best authority that there's going to be a frightful row in Peru before long, and like the soldier of fortune that you know I am just now, I'm going down to see if there's a respectable opening for a free lance. If not, I am thinking of going on into Chile, for the Chilians are bound to be at loggerheads with the Argentines over this frontier question before long, and I may find something to do down there. At any rate, as the Irishman said, 'I'm spoiling for a fight,' and just now South America seems to be the only promising field. I suppose you're going down by the *Imperial* to-morrow. In that case I shall have the pleasure of being a fellow-traveller."



A swim in the cool of the morning.

"Yes," said the Professor, "we are. I suppose you'll be going ashore at Callao. We are going on to Mollendo, and up to the Lake. Possibly into Bolivia after that."

"I don't know," said the Captain. "It depends on what I hear at Callao. I may stop there or go on to Valparaiso. Are you alone, or have you any other friends in your party?"

"Er—no," replied the Professor, as Ruth thought, a trifle nervously. "We have, a—well, a friend with us who is rather an invalid. Indeed, I may say he is travelling under the medical care of the doctor here. The fact is, he is a wealthy Peruvian, mine-owner and that sort of thing, you know, who has been some time in Europe and is just recovering from a long and dangerous illness. He is going back to try the effect of the air of his native mountains. He belongs to one of the old pre-Spanish families. In fact, I believe he claims lineal descent from the Incas themselves. I suppose we shall meet to-morrow at breakfast, and then I shall be able to introduce you."

"Only, unfortunately," broke in Djama, who for the last few minutes had been longing to gag the Professor. "Our friend, my patient, I mean, speaks very little English and—ah—between ourselves, Captain Hartness, I may say that his malady to a certain extent is a mental one. He suffers from illusions, you know, and that sort of thing. He is a great deal better than he was, but still his faculties are not quite on the proper balance yet. He is very deeply interested in the past history of Peru, and sometimes mixes himself up with the old Incas. A curious delusion but perfectly harmless, but still I thought it better to tell you this at once because you see——"

"Oh, yes, I see perfectly," said the Captain. "Thanks, of course, as we shall be fellow-travellers for some days it is as well to know that. Curious things these delusions, aren't they? I knew a poor fellow in Egypt who got sunstroke and went home under the firm impression that he was the Mahdi, and was being sent to England to be tried for his life. By the way, Professor, talking about Incas, how is that wonderful mummy you found somewhere up country? You know, the one you showed me when I met you in Arequipa."

"Oh, ah—perfectly well," he half stammered; "that is to say, of course, I mean as right as a mummy can be. Wonderful specimen, wasn't it? I never was so proud of a find in all my life."

"Now, I suppose you are going out to find some more like it if you can," said the Captain, holding out his hand again. "Well, good-night, it doesn't do to keep late hours in the tropics, and we shall have to be off early in the morning. Hullo, where's Miss Djama? I hope I haven't frightened her away by my sudden intrusion."

"My sister is a bit nervous of the bad character she has heard of the night air in Panama," said the Doctor, who was no less surprised than the Professor at his sister's disappearance; but he didn't show it. "Well, good-night Captain, I suppose we shall meet at breakfast. Confound the fellow," he muttered, as soon as Hartness was out of earshot. "I wonder what unlucky fate brought him here just now? Look here, Lamson, can this friend of yours speak Spanish?"

"Yes," said the Professor, "like a native. Why do you ask?"

"Great Heavens, man, can't you see? Why, he'll knock the bottom out of that story of yours before he has known his Highness ten minutes. You've told him that Vilcaroya is a Peruvian mine-owner, and that sort of thing, and he doesn't know two words of Spanish. Phew—I shall have to think of a way out of this fix before breakfast, or we shall have somewhat of a scene."

When they got back to the hotel they found that Ruth had gone to bed without saying her customary good-night to either of them.

CHAPTER VI.

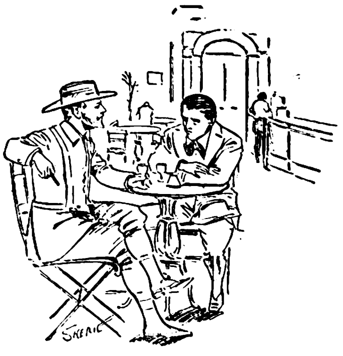
MORNING REFLECTIONS.

The next morning Captain Hartness was up before daybreak, and took a boat out into the bay for a swim in the cool of the morning. Not everyone would have run so great an apparent risk, but he was familiar enough with tropical waters to know that sharks usually give a good swimmer a wide berth, and very seldom attack anyone who is not in distress. He got back to the hotel about nine, and the first person he met was the Doctor, who was evidently on the look out for him. He came out of the entrance hall and shook hands with much more cordiality than he had shown the night before, and said:

"Ah, Captain Hartness, well met! To tell you the truth, I have been waiting for you. Of course you have heard that the *Imperial* is not going to sail until twelve, so we have plenty of time for a half-past nine breakfast, which I've ordered for the four of us, and then to go on board comfortably. Now, come and have a cocktail. I have something to tell you which ought to be told before breakfast."

"*Bueno!*" said the Captain, little knowing how the Spanish word jarred on his companion's ears. "I'm just your man, for a cocktail is the very thing I was thinking about."

They went and sat down at an isolated table in the big bar-room, which opens out into the plaza, and as soon as the waiter had brought the cocktails and left them Djama lifted his glass with the usual "*salud!*" drained it, and put it down again. The Captain followed suit, and then Djama put his elbows on the table and said in a low, confidential tone:



Sat down at an isolated table in the big bar-room.

"I want to tell you something about my patient which I forgot to tell you last night. It is due both to yourself and him, and that you should know it before you meet him, as you will do in half an hour or so, at breakfast, for it may save some awkwardness and possible unpleasantness. I told you last night that he has been a great invalid, and that his malady is party mental. He's perfectly harmless and quite rational, saving only as regards that curious illusion of his about the Incas, but, in addition to this, during his illness he has utterly forgotten his native language, and with it, in fact, his own identity. The result has been that since his partial recovery he has picked up a little English, just as a child might. Like many people who are partially insane, he is intellectually very active, and he is learning English fast. Of course, when he gets back home he will begin to pick up Spanish again; but neither Lamson nor myself speak Spanish with sufficient fluency to feel justified in letting him acquire a corrupt accent from us, so we invariably speak to him in English. You speak Spanish quite fluently, I believe?"

"Yes, pretty well; but like most Englishmen, you know, I prefer to speak my own language. In fact, I never speak any other unless I am obliged to; so, of course, what I have to say to your patient I shall say in English, and you may rely upon me, Doctor, to have every respect for his unfortunate infirmities. By the way, as regards his illusion, I suppose you have to humour it a little in the usual way?"

"Oh, yes; you know, nothing is more dangerous in these cases than irritation, and nothing irritates anyone suffering under an illusion more than displaying any incredulity. In fact, we go so far as to converse with him, privately, of course, as though the illusion were actually true. You see, it doesn't really matter; the great thing is to get his physical health perfectly restored first, and then trust to healthy, natural surroundings to gradually destroy the illusions. When others are present we never mention it; but as you are a friend of Lamson's, and will probably be with us a good deal, I thought it only due to you to put you *au fait* with the circumstances."

"Thanks very much. I am exceedingly obliged to you, for I have no doubt you have saved me from making some howling mistake which might have had serious consequences. Have another? No? Well I suppose you are right. You know what they say out here? One cocktail's just enough, two are too many, and three are not half enough. It's an insidious drink, and that's the way it takes you. Ah, here's Lamson and your sister, and—eh! Good God, no, of course, it couldn't be. What a fool I am!"

"What's the matter?" said Djama, slipping his hand under his arm as if to stop him.

"Oh, nothing; I—ah; oh, of course, I suppose that's your patient, is it? The man with the bronze skin and Inca eatures. I thought I had seen him before, that's all."

As he spoke the Captain walked off, followed by Djama, who had turned a trifle paler than his wont, towards the archway through which he had seen Ruth, the Professor, and Vilcaroya, standing in the vestibule. As the Professor introduced him to the Inca, and he shook hands with him, he gave him a quick, keen glance which only Ruth noticed, and said half to him and half to her:

"I am more than honoured to make the acquaintance of one who bears so ancient and honourable a name, and who, as far as appearance goes, might be the very Vilcaroya of the legend, saving only the dress, if the lapse of the centuries didn't make that impossible."

Vilcaroya shot an inquiring glance at the Professor, and said in Quichua, before Djama could do anything to stop him:

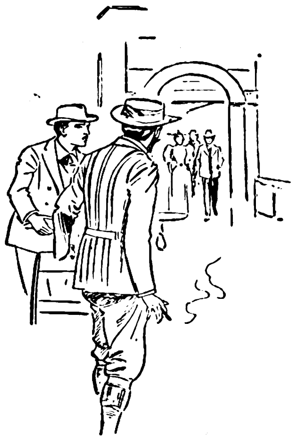
"Have you told the stranger my story?"

"No," replied the Professor, in the same tongue. "I should not do that unless you first consented."

"It is good," replied the Inca. "I will think."

Whether or not the Captain saw anything peculiar in this little dialogue, or whether he recognised the language in which it was conducted, he was too well bred to show it. He had got into conversation with Ruth, and she saw something like a passing flash of surprise or recognition come into his eyes and vanish again in a moment. The conversation then, as at breakfast, was strictly confined to generalities, and Vilcaroya took a very limited share of it, yet using his still rather scanty vocabulary with wonderful judgment and correctness.

Meanwhile, under the surface of the conversation, several hidden under-currents of thought were running in different directions. Ruth was thinking, with a vexed apprehension, of the terrible prospect which the conversation in the Plaza had called up. She was wondering, too, what part this newly-arrived friend of the Professor was going to take in the work in hand. Her instinct told her that he would inevitably play some part, and that possibly a very conspicuous one; for she had already recognised that his was one of those quiet, strong, masterful spirits which enter deliberately upon great enterprises, risking everything to attain their object with quiet calculation, which takes the extremest dangers as the necessary and inevitable risks of the game.



"I thought I had seen him before, that's all."

He was a soldier by profession and a soldier of fortune by choice. Her womanly intuition instantly connected him with the Inca's dream of a restored empire. He was, no doubt, well versed in all the arts of modern war. He was brave, daring, and ambitious; the Professor had already told her that during a long chat before breakfast. What if he were to gain Vilcaroya's confidence, as he well might? The Inca was a perfectly free agent, and could choose what friends or allies he pleased. The one tie between him and the Professor and her brother was the finding and restoration of Golden Star. That accomplished, he would no doubt fulfil his promise as to the hidden treasures in whose existence she implicitly believed, and there would be an end to their connection.

Beyond this point her thoughts somehow refused to run; they were checked by a strange unwillingness to pursue the subject any farther.

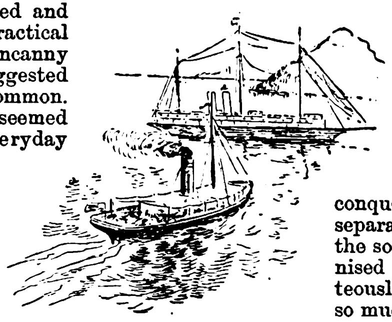
Meanwhile her brother was fuming inwardly, and wondering what he could do to prevent any confidential intercourse between Vilcaroya and this most unwelcome intruder, as he perhaps naturally considered the soldier to be, for he, too, saw just as quickly as his sister had done how far-reaching might be the consequences of an understanding between them.

Francis Hartness was avowedly going out to South America to find work as profitable as possible for his sword. To Djama he was an adventurer pure and simple, and what more profitable work could such a man find than that which he knew perfectly well Vilcaroya was contemplating?

This work involved a racial war which might spread from end to end of the continent, and which would certainly cost enormous sums of money—an expenditure which by no means chimed in with the bargain that he had made with the Professor, who at that moment was trying to satisfy himself as to the wisdom of admitting Hartness into the secret, and the possibility or otherwise of keeping it from him.

As for the Captain, his mind, accustomed to prompt and independent action, was swiftly analysing the characters of his new acquaintances, and weighing the possibilities of the truth or falsehood, whole or partial, of the undoubtedly strange story that had been told to him; but under this lay another stratum of thought, which he was reserving for future and more deliberate consideration, of which the subjects would be Ruth and Vilcaroya.

Ruth he was already prepared to like and trust, if need be, as much as he instinctively disliked and distrusted her brother. To his clear, practical vision there was something occult and uncanny about this man—something that suggested knowledge and power far out of the common. Those dark mesmeric eyes of his always seemed to be looking over the boundaries of everyday things, and his conversation always seemed to suggest the idea that, while he was talking on one subject, he was thinking of something very different.



The "Imperial."

Then there was this curious patient of his with the physiognomy, half-Phœnician, half-Indian, that he had seen among the natives of the Cuzco district, and yet infinitely more refined and intellectual. Where had he got the light bronze of his skin, the high-bred delicacy of his features, the soft, glossy brown of his hair and that unmistakable light of a strong intellect which shone in his eyes, and where, above all, had he got that marvellous resemblance to the lifeless, long-dead mummy that the Professor had shown to him in Arequipa?

These were the points over which he had already promised himself some hours of quiet reflection as the *Imperial* was going southwards over the smooth, sunny waters of the Pacific, and the result of those reflections might probably make a considerable difference, not only in his immediately future course of action, but in the whole work of his life. He didn't just then know how or why, but his instinct told him that it might be so.

As for Vilcaroya himself, as he did least of the talking, he probably did most of the thinking. Like all of his caste, he had been trained to war from his boyhood, and had led many a troop in the armies of the great Inca to victory and conquest, and, in spite of the centuries that separated their two ages and their two worlds, the soldier spirit within him had already recognised its kinship with this strong and courteously spoken soldier who had seen war made so much more terrible by those strange flame-and-thunder weapons of which he had heard much since his awakening, and which he all too vividly remembered as one of the causes of the sudden downfall of the empire of his ancestors.

Such then were the various states of mind in which the momentous little party embarked at noon that day on board the *Imperial*, which an hour later left her anchorage off the island of El Morro and started on her southward voyage with a cargo of possibilities of which her captain and crew had very little idea.

(To be continued.)

IN THE REDWOODS.

THERE were three of us sitting in one of the luxurious corridors of the Bath Hotel, Bournemouth. I was the only Englishman of the party. The girl opposite me was an American; her companion came from Southern Africa, and the three continents were represented. I had finished my story, and the miner had fallen to and capped it with ease. Then we both looked at the American. She shook her head and laughed. "I don't know one," she said. "I don't know how to begin."

"It was——" I suggested.

"It was the night of November 25th, 1880. The moon, half spent, rose over the long unbroken range of mountains that extends along the Northern coast of California from Bodega Inlet to Humbolt Bay—How's that for a beginning?"

"Capital!" we said together. "Go on." She resumed:

"Perhaps an hour before midnight, a young girl stood in the doorway of a deserted cabin, far up in the Russian River cañon, watching the east grow light, and waiting for the moon to rise. A trail, half obliterated by the growth of underbrush and fallen trees, ran a few yards in front of the cabin, and led on down the cañon to the camp. By the light of the moon this trail would be plainly visible at a place a quarter of a mile higher up the mountain where it crossed a clearing in the redwoods; and towards this spot the girl's face was turned.

"She was alone, and seemed impatient for the coming light, which lingered so long among the tall trees on the summit of the range. A cloak, black and long, and from its shape evidently a 'gentleman's,' was thrown over her shoulders, and its hood covered her head. No sound stirred the deep stillness of the forest, save, now and then, the cry of some mountain cat. She had played with mountain cats; why should they frighten her? Yet she shuddered at the cry. It was so near. Even the creaking of a board, as she stepped back a little into the cabin, startled her.

"Then she drew the cloak closer about her and stepped out.

"The moon had risen. It looked like a great fire among the redwoods before it came up from their midst, but now all the cañon was flooded with its light. The trail which Mal had been straining her eyes to see through the darkness now showed clearly where it came from a thick growth of chaparral, and she watched its stretch across the clearing more earnestly than ever. She had not long to wait, for soon the man for whom she was looking issued from the brush. He was on horseback, and a riderless horse followed him. At the centre of the clearing he stopped and discharged a small revolver.

"Mal's heart leaped. 'All is right,' she said slowly to herself; but her conscience told her all was wrong, and she burst into sobs.

"'Poor dad, he'll never take me back—an' Ben, an' Jim. Oh, I know he'll never do it! But if he don't,' she said, between her teeth, 'I've seen folks die, an'—an'——' But a pair of strong arms were round her, and that voice which had led her so far was calling her his Mal, his sweet Mal, his little Mal, and asking her if tears were all she had for him.

"Her arms sought his neck, and she begged him not to be angry. 'I won't cry no more,' she said imploringly. 'Promise never to be angry with me again.'

"'And now, Mal,' he said, 'we must be getting out of here. We'll cross the river and stop at Jim's.'

"'No, no, no,' she begged, 'not at Jim's. Jim would know something was wrong, an'—an', he might *kill* you,' she whispered.

"'Well, if you can stand it, we'll cross the range and stop in one of the old logging camps to-night. To-morrow we'll go on to Sonoma.'

"'Oh, I can stand it,' she said. 'I've been there with dad lots o' times; only *please* don't stop at Jim's.'

"Her lover was looking at her attentively. 'Do you know, Mal, you look divine in that coat of mine? I shall have to will it to you,' he said, with a little laugh. It was a forced laugh, but it was just as sweet to Mal, and when he lifted her into the saddle she clung to his neck until he had kissed her many times, and called her over and over again by all those sweet names that love makes up for its ornaments. Then he threw himself upon his own horse, and in single file, he leading, down into the depths of the cañon they departed.

"The trail which they followed had once been used as a log-way. On each side rose the giant redwoods, towering high and dark. In the dense part of the forest, where the moon only shone on the higher branches of the trees, they looked like grey crested phantoms. Stirred by the light wind, they seemed to breathe a sigh as Mal passed beneath them; and Mal answered them with a sigh from her own heart.

"Among these trees had been her home. Their every sound and look, in pleasant and fearful weather, she knew; and now she was leaving them—was it for ever?

"Shortly they came to the old camp, where she had spent so many happy hours watching the huge logs thin themselves out into timber, and seeing the great saw spin round and round. Perhaps some of that very timber which she had seen cut had gone to the city to help build *his* house, the house which he had told her was to be hers. Thus she thought on, until leaving the camp they descended into the creek bed, and followed on down towards the river. They could hear it rippling over the stones at the crossing.

"Then they passed Jim's. It was so strange, she thought, to go by Jim's without stopping; Jim, who had rescued her from drowning when she had attempted to cross to his cabin during the rising of the river, the fall before; Jim, who was almost as dear as her own father, and so much gentler; Jim who loved her so.

"'Jim!' she called aloud.

"Her lover halted, startled at the sudden cry, and came to her.

"'I didn't mean to do that,' she said. 'It came out —I couldn't help it. I was thinking so much of him, and wishing I might just say good-bye to him, that it slipped out all of a sudden.'

"A mile beyond Jim's, they came into the trail again, just where it commenced its upward climb into the redwoods of the coast range. An hour later, at the edge of the woods of El Diablo, they reached the cabin where they were to spend the night. Here they dismounted, and Mal's lover led the horses into the brush, while she, not the least afraid, pushed open the door of the dark and vacant hut.

"There was a close and stifling odour within, from the old and musty straw scattered over the bunk in the corner. A wild cat jumped out through the window. Mal gave a little start. She sat down on the edge of the brush, where she could see her lover loosening the saddle girths. Once more she thought of her home, far back at the head of the Russian river. That dear old river—how it pained her to leave its soft ripple, and its blue, clear waters, and her 'dad,' and Jim, and her brothers. Thoughts of them all came surging up from her heart. She hid her face in her hands and burst into sobs. So long as *he* was with her she was happy; but alone, how troubled she grew!

"Some strips had been torn from the roof of the cabin, and through the opening a little moonlight fell upon her. When she raised her face it was very white. The hood had partially fallen from her head, and one of her locks of ruddy hair had shaken itself loose from the knot into which it had been tied, and had slipped down upon her shoulder. Her lover kissed her when he came. Then all was changed, and her heart leapt with joy.

"'You are not sorry, my sweet one, you came, are you?' he said to her tenderly.

"She looked up at him. 'Why do you always think I'm sorry? I *ain't* sorry; only dad—dad'll miss me, and I know he'll never take me back,' she said; 'an' Jim —Jim'll miss me too.'

"'I'm afraid you're getting tired of *my* love,' he said.

"'No, no, I'm not. I won't speak of them again. I won't, I won't,' she cried, clinging closer to him and trying to stop the heavy sobs which *would* come, even when he had told her, all over again, how much she was to him. 'An' you'll marry me when we get to the city, won't you?' she asked.

"But he turned his head away, and she could not see the look that came into his face.

"'My dear Mal, why do you cry so? You know I love you. Rest your head here and go to sleep. I will wake you when it's light.'

"So, with a sigh, her head dropped upon his shoulder, and Mal went to sleep.

"The moon had risen a little higher. It shone full upon Mal's face, and her lover kissed her. 'One would almost take her for a man in this coat of mine,' he said to himself, 'but how sweet her face is,' and another caress told him how sweet, indeed, it was."

The girl left off and laughed a little consciously. She had been carried away by the interest of the story. We begged her to continue. We were enthralled by her simple, weird style. She began again:

"A cool breeze had sprung up from the coast, and was bringing a heavy fog with it. For some time Mal's lover watched it through a break in the trees, as it came rolling in over the range and settled down in a cloud over the Russian river valley. Then he must have fallen asleep, but only for a moment. He awoke with a little start, and under the impression that he had heard voices. He listened. The wind was stirring the dead leaves and moaning among the trees. Was it only the wind he had heard? Gently he laid Mal down upon the bunk, and drew the hood around her face. He stepped to the window and listened again.

"Still there was only the sound of the wind. Yet he was sure he had heard other voices than those of the forest. Yes, he was right. Presently there came to him the sound of crackling brush. Some one was coming. Yes, now he caught a glimpse of some half dozen horsemen on the trail.

"'Heavens! Her father's horse and Jim's,' he breathed. 'They're after me; they'll lynch me if they catch me!'

"He glanced hastily at Mal, kissed her softly—it must be his last, he knew—then out through the door, into the long grass, upon his horse, and away.

"The men coming up the trail heard him crash through the brush in the distance, but thought it some deer, startled at their approach.

"A little distance from the cabin the men halted and dismounted. Their leader was Mal's father. He went softly to the window and looked in. The figure in the black coat caught his eye. Fury seized him at the thought that it was the abductor of his child. It was all he cared for, to have his vengeance upon *him*. He did not look to see if Mal was there too. He did not think of her. His passion for revenge had mastered him.

"He beckoned to the men. There were six of them. They crept stealthily through the open door, Jim and Mal's father a little in advance of the rest. For one moment they hesitated, then threw a heavy sack about the sleeping figure, and drew it tight round the feet and neck with ropes. It was quickly done. There was a half smothered cry, a brief struggle, and the men bore their burden away in the redwoods.

"The moon hid itself behind some dark clouds. The foggy winds ceased sobbing among the trees, and all the voices of the deep forests were hushed. By the sound of a distant whistle they knew it was near morning.

"A few yards from the trail they stopped. A rope was run up over the projecting limb of a huge tree, and its noose passed to Jim to fasten. The others knelt upon the struggling, prostrate figure to quiet it. With a quick jerk Jim loosened the cords that had held the sack close about the shoulders and neck, and slipped the noose over in their stead.

"'A'ready,' he breathed. The men got off the body. There was a sound as of rope running over hard bark, and Jim and Mal's father lifted the figure to a standing posture.

"A moment the men hesitated. For an instant the noose slackened its grip. Life and sense and thought rushed back to Mal with that breath, and the stillness of the redwoods awoke to the skriek of her voice calling: 'Jim! Jim! Jim!'

"The figure in the sack fell heavily to the ground. The terror of the woman's voice came over the men. They stood speechless. Again Mal called. But it was only a moan—'Jim, Jim!'

"Now they bestirred themselves. They tore open the sack, and freed Mal from the cloak and the smothering hood. Jim knelt to hold her.

"'And he, where is he? He, your man?' they shouted.

"Mal shook her head.

"One of the men spoke up excitedly: 'The crackling brush we heard! He saw us, he was off. We can——'

"But without the words the fact had communicated itself to them. They were mounted in a moment, and off down the trail, Jim alone remaining with Mal.

"The two listened to the mad clatter of hoofs over the stony trail, until they died away in the distance. Jim was still kneeling by the girl's side. He put his hand on her shoulder.

"'Do yo' love him so, girl?' he said.

"But Mal only gripped his arm tightly and leant forward to listen more intently.

"'He may get away, girl, he may. Do yo' hope he will?'

"Mal looked at the man.

"'Jim,' she said firmly, 'they must get him; they must kill him. I hate him—he ran away!'

"But even now Mal's lover lay in the road a mile down the trail—dead! though not by the vengeance of those who sought to kill him. Fast to his boot were a stirrup and a broken strap; the saddle he had had no time to tighten had turned in his mad race for life, and he had been dragged over the rocks of El Diablo. The men found him as morning broke, grey and dull, through the white, damp fog that was coming in thicker and thicker among the redwoods. Like a shroud for the dead came the fleecy clouds, and wrapping their mantles of white about the great trees, obliterated all before them."

The girl stopped. We both looked at one another, and said, "Thank you," in the same breath. It was beautiful.

JEROME BULL.

The Picture and the Conscience.

Some three or four years ago the scientific and social world of Paris was astonished and shocked by the news that Doctor Emile Paul, the famous specialist on mental diseases, had died by his own hand.

At the same time it was announced that Madame Revallon, the widow of the well-known magistrate, had retired to a convent with the intention of taking the veil.

Society connected the two paragraphs mysteriously, for Emile Paul was an old friend of the late magistrate, and strange rumours floated about for the traditional nine days. Then new sensations cropped up and the matter was forgotten.

* * * * *

I was lately exploring that part of Paris where Jew dealers and picture brokers most do congregate, and amongst other curiosities I observed a frameless portrait of a red-robed magistrate; but, strange to say, the robe was slashed and torn, as by reckless stabs of a knife, and, stranger still, the eyes had been cut out neatly, leaving two round holes in a smooth, grinning face.

The effect was hideous—so much so that I hardly dared to look at the thing a second time; but my curiosity was awakened.

I was about to enter the shop in order to make inquiries concerning the canvas, when an old friend and fellow student laid his hand on my shoulder, and said:

"I saw you looking at that thing. Is it not hideous? The history of that portrait will interest you, a student of the human passions. Come to my room. I have three letters which tell the whole story. You shall read them."

I accompanied him to his rooms. He opened an old-fashioned desk, and produced the three following letters:

First Letter.

"Monday, August 20th.

"My dear Verdon,—How fruitful of sad events the last three months have been. My mother gone, my brother maimed and disabled for life, and now poor Revallon gone! Helen in mourning—and how pretty she looks! She weeps continually. Poor Helen! She sees no visitor except myself, but there is no whisper of scandal. Why should there be? Am I not one of her late husband's oldest friends? She receives me in the little blue room as of old—there hangs the portrait of her husband in his magisterial robes. You know the portrait—the likeness is excellent—it has caught his expression to perfection. You know that clean-shaven face, with those mocking, cruel, cold steel-grey eyes, those cynical, sneering lips. But the eyes, the eyes, they have in them that strange yellow light which I so well remember and so hated while he lived. How I longed to see them closed for ever! How I longed to finish that hateful, piercing stare! But he is gone! Dead! Buried! Yet that terrible portrait, with the piercing, yellow rayed eyes, haunts us, tortures us, freezes the very kisses on our lips. I hate them! I hate them!

"At night Helen locks her bedroom door, for she imagines that he will leave the canvas and come to seek her. When he was alive we had no fear of discovery; now that he is dead he pursues us with horrible persistency.

"He seems to have waited so that his vengeance might be the more awful. We have obtained the freedom for which we longed, but it is worse than discovery itself.

"In six months we shall be married; we shall then realise the dream of the fevered days when he lived—— But no! no! that dream is unrealisable, because the ghost of the past rises up between us, real and living, with steel-grey eyes.—Emile."

Second Letter.

"Friday, August 30th.

"My dear Friend,—Thanks for your letter. Yes, I know, it is nerves, all nerves! But, Verdon, the dead have their revenge. Every day I take the train to Bas Meudon, not to see Helen, but—to see him, the dead husband whom I loathed in life, because he lived, and whom I loath in death, because he has not died. I go there because I must; I am drawn thither—I know not why—but—go I must.

"In the little room where we sit with our eyes fixed on the same object, for we gaze always on the staring portrait in spite of ourselves, it hypnotises us with its evil smile, and we cannot escape it; many a weary hour passes. We rise and move to another part of the room, but the eyes follow us, haunt us, look into our very souls.

"Then I cry out, 'Who accuses me?' and I falter, 'It was a mistake—a mistake!' Poisons form a dangerous part of medical science. I did not—I do not believe I poisoned him. I know he did die of poison—but it was an error. I did not want him to die.

"Oh! those eyes, those eyes which I hate and which I go to see every day, without even speaking to Helen, who, pale with terror, implores me to calm myself, to have pity on her sufferings. She sees a new light in my eyes—a new light which frightens myself, when, by chance, some glass reflects my fevered countenance.

"That portrait—I have asked Helen to remove it, but she replied:

"'Impossible! What would people say? And, if I did—it would be useless. He would come—all the same.'

"She is right. Sleeping or waking, he haunts me. I cannot escape from him.—Your unhappy Emile."

Third Letter.

"September 5th.

"My dear Friend,—All is over. I have cut out those two eyes with my scalpel. The steely, serpent-like orbs are gone, and in their place there are two empty holes. At last, at last! I held them in my hands and crushed them. Crushed them until I buried my nails deep in my own flesh. Ah! they would leer no more; they were finished now; the hideous yellow light was extinguished for ever. Now could I rest, for I had annihilated the sneer—the penetrating, insolent, prying sneer which maddened me. But was it so? I looked once more on the red-robed portrait, and then, oh, merciful heavens! I saw—I saw that the empty holes still glared with a strange unholy light; and I shrieked aloud like a wild beast, and fell upon the picture, slashing at it and cutting at it with my scalpel. I was mad—mad with the most terrible madness—that which reasons.

"This is my last letter. Before you receive it I shall be dead—dead before the empty and accusing sockets which arraign and find me guilty of foul murder.—Your miserable Emile."

H. B.

THE BACHELOR BROTHERS

Or, BLOOD WILL TELL.

"*From John Ernest Moncton, Havre, to James Cyril Moncton, London:*

"Sail to-morrow. Have Tom Lander and his little girl in tow. Will visit us."

James Moncton read and re-read the cablegram. He was pleased, very pleased, indeed, at the prospect of seeing his brother fully a month earlier than he had expected to enjoy that pleasure. But Lander—poor old Tom Lander! What a host of queer memories the mere mention of that well-remembered name served to conjure up.

Both he and his brother knew him well; the scapegrace at school, though by all odds the best fighter in it; the wild young man-about-town scattering a none too generous fortune to the winds; the shiftless ne'er-do-well, as the more censorious of his friends were apt to term him; and lastly, the Quixotic idiot who had quite estranged himself from society by a chivalrous marriage to a girl of obscure birth.

But that was many years ago, and the scapegrace's old schoolfellow pushed the grey hair abstractedly back from his temples as he wondered how the scapegrace would look after his long sojourn abroad, and whether he had quite recovered from the loss of the wife who had caused his social downfall in his youth, but whom, as John Moncton very well knew, poor old Tom had idolised as the very apple of his eye.

After a long period of pleasant thought, this handsome and warm-hearted old bachelor rang for the smug-faced but wholly correct gentleman that served himself and his brother as a valet. "Benson," he said briskly, "Mr. John will be home to-morrow. Get his rooms ready, and also prepare rooms for a friend of mine and his little girl who are to visit us. Tell the housekeeper they must be made as comfortable as possible."

The house that the brothers occupied in Russell Square was big enough to have accommodated a trio of Tom Landers, with a following of half-a-dozen "little girls" apiece. There was no fear that the visitors would not be made comfortable.

James Moncton felt as fit as a two-year-old colt as he drove down to the station to meet the train. It was a lovely spring day, and he really longed to see his brother, for between these two there existed a great and enduring affection.

But his countenance fell as he espied his travellers descending on to the platform. Tom Lander leant heavily on his brother's arm and smiled in an aimless and unrecognising sort of way as he shook hands with the waiting James. There was that in his face that one instantly recognises as the look of a poor beggar whose earthly race is pretty nearly run.

James exchanged meaning glances with his brother, and led the way to the carriage. Then for the first time he recognised "the little girl" who followed, demurely enough, behind.

The face was that of a child of, perhaps, fifteen, but the figure, which was the very perfection of grace, that of an almost fully-developed woman. Her eyes and hair were deepest black, and her mouth as red and full as a ripe cherry. When they had entered the vehicle she leant her head on her father's shoulder. He, poor fellow, gazed vacantly out of the window at the stirring scenes of the streets and muttered softly to himself now and then.

Arrived at the house, Tom and his daughter were shown to their rooms by Benson, whose parchment visage almost lost its habitually dead expression at the sight of this exquisite child. Then the brothers had their talk.

"How long has Tom been like that?" asked James, with a suspicious tremble in his voice.

"He's been getting worse ever since *she* died," answered John. "You know—although you must never let him know *we* either of us know it—she went to the bad two years before the end."

"How are his affairs?"

"He has none. He's absolutely without a penny. I thought"— and Mr. John Ernest Moncton looked lightly self-conscious—"that we'd give him a bed here till—till the end, you know. Poor Tom! It won't be very long."

"I agree with you," acquiesced his brother, "but what are you going to do with the young woman?"

"Young woman!" exclaimed John, amazed, "why she's only a child."

James eyed his brother with the suspicion of a twinkle in his kind eye. "Study her a little more closely, old man," he advised. "I fancy she is about as old as she looks."

The doctor gave Tom Lander a month to live. While half unconscious of his surroundings most of the time, he had comparatively lucid intervals, at which time he would play poker with his two faithful old friends for enormous sums, that he fancied were being added to his bank account as soon as won. The end came very suddenly and very peaceably at one of these card parties. Tom laid his hand carefully on the table and leant back in his chair, closing his eyes. Then he opened those poor tired orbs, and the brothers saw there were tears in them. He was sensible at last. "Boys," he said, very gently, "take care of the little one. She's of bad stock, perhaps, but—Marie!" His slender, nervous hand went suddenly to his throat, and his eyes closed again and didn't open.

The girl's grief was heartrending. After the funeral she kept her rooms for days, and had to be almost forced to take nourishment. Then, one bright morning, John coaxed her into his dog-cart, and when they returned her white cheeks had a little pink spot in each of them. The same week James took her to a *matinée*, and she began to recover her spirits.

These two lonely bachelors now had something to live for. They could not have lavished more kindness upon her if she had been a princess, instead of being the daughter of a dead gambler. Her wardrobe was replenished handsomely, and a corps of teachers was engaged for her. In the evenings she would sit on a footstool on the hearthrug between them and chatter away like a linnet, or sing some funny little French songs that sometimes, alas, were not so proper as they should have been. Though, as neither of these two old chaps knew the language very well, it did not matter much.

Only Benson, who used to appear with the decanters just before the young lady's hour for retiring, used sometimes to allow his face to break into a smile after leaving the library. Benson had once been in the service of the Baron Chevriac, in Paris, you see.

It was perhaps worthy of notice that these quiet evenings were the only occasions on which the three remained together. It was generally John that took Estelle—that was her name—to drive in the afternoon, and James that escorted her to theatres or concerts in the evenings. And while it could hardly be said as yet that there was any jealousy between the brothers, when either of them happened to come home with a pet plan in his kind old head for her pleasure, it was annoying to find her out somewhere with the other.

As for Estelle, she soon became as gay and light-hearted as a bird. She sang and romped about the house with her dogs and kittens, poked fun at the leather-faced Benson, and played all manner of funny pranks on the venerable housekeeper, which dear old soul, of course, adored her to distraction. She was like a perpetual sunbeam, and both her old guardians began to wonder how they could ever have existed without her.

But one day James came to John with a troubled look on his face. "Brother," said he earnestly, "I think it's about time we were sending Estelle away somewhere."

The other stared. "What on earth for?" he ejaculated.

"She's growing very fast, you know," said James, "and if you must know, people are talking."

"Then let the beasts talk!" exclaimed his brother angrily. "Don't worry, James, we both love the child. In Heaven's name, let's keep her with us as long as we can."

Perhaps James was secretly glad of his brother's state of mind. He had made his protest, and his conscience was at last clear. But, as evil fortune would have it, he returned home late that evening, and just in time to catch sight of a tableau that made him draw a long breath of envy.

It was nearly dark in the library, and Estelle was kneeling on the hearthrug at John's side. Moreover, as James entered, his brother was in the act of imprinting a kiss on the white forehead.

He stood stock still until Estelle, peeping out from beneath her tangle of black curls like a squirrel, espied him with a little shriek of dismay, rose and fled past him, and went flying upstairs. John rose, shame-faced and red, and, man-like, proceeded to try to brazen a bad thing out.

"Spying, eh?" he snapped.

"I did not think," said James rather brokenly, "that my brother could so far forget his duty to his dead friend."

"Who's forgotten his duty? Why, man, I won't let even you, my brother, insinuate——"

"Oh, of course not," sneered James, growing angry in his turn. Quite irrespective of the torture caused him by his brother's conduct, there was another sort of pain tugging at his brave old heart. You see, "the little girl" had been very just and impartial in her reception of the devotion of the two brothers. "I suppose, then," he went on, after a pause, "that you intend marrying her?"

"And suppose I do?" jerked out John; "whose affair is it?"

"In that case," answered James, with great gravity —"well, in that case, good-night, John!"

One brother sat for hours smoking by the light of the tall library lamp. The other took a long, long walk. He asked himself a score of times if it were really honest and moral indignation that he felt, or was it simply commonplace, wretched envy. He gave it up at length, and went to the club to sleep. And thus had the "little girl" succeeded in effecting the first break in a friendship of forty years.

* * * * *

Both brothers were extremely miserable for four days, though neither would have admitted it to the other under pressure of the rack and thumbscrew. Perhaps of the two James was the more thoroughly wretched, inasmuch as it was he that had declared war, and made a reconciliation, unless under the conditions imposed by himself, impossible.

On the morning of the fifth day he was rather surprised to receive an urgent request from his brother to meet him at the club. He was a little in doubt as to whether to go or not, but finally decided to do so. He found John seated at a table daintily set for two. There was a moment's embarrassed silence.

John spoke first. "Sit down, old man," said he, with a decidedly sheepish look, "and have some luncheon."

"Not yet," answered his brother very stiffly; "explain first, if you please."

These two foolish old fellows looked at each other wistfully for a moment, and then John said, looking more sheepish than ever: "Don't be an idiot, Jim; you can afford to sit down. The cause of the quarrel has disappeared." And he laughed nervously.

"What's that you say?" stammered James, growing rather white.

For answer his brother handed him a note written in Estelle's extremely regular hand.

"You dear old humbugs," it ran, "you'll feel it, but I am really not to blame. You see, I'm a Paris girl, and you are really slow, although you are both such sweet old gentlemen. I've taken Benson with me, because he amuses me. I know you won't mind the little I took with me. You'd have both of you given me much more for a wedding present. Please don't chase Benson. He got the money for me, and he's not a bad fellow. Good-bye. Come and see us in Paris."

"What on earth does she mean?" gasped James, as he laid down the letter.

"Only that I'm £5,000 poorer," answered John, with a blush. "You see, I was proud of her beautiful writing, and helped her to improve it."

"Ah!" sighed James, "it's in the blood, I suppose. Shall you follow them?"

"Not if you'll call it even," answered John, with a look of great affection across the table. "Really, after all, you know, I saw her first. But the luncheon's ready."

And they managed to make it a royal one.

Mary Bryan.

LO-TO-KAH & THE WITCH

ONE hot summer day, after leisurely exploring a quaint old Indian pueblo in New Mexico, I was resting in the shade of an adobe wall when I caught sight of a horseman riding towards the pueblo. Before he was near enough for me to discern his features I could see by his costume that he was no pueblo Indian, and as he rode through the narrow streets and came into the bare little plaza I recognised in him my friend Lo-To-Kah. He was very old, but he sat as erect on his horse as any warrior in the prime of life. When he saw me he rode to my side and called out:

"Ho, friend, vagrant *Merikotch* that you are, I come upon you in all places. I am glad to fall in with you this day, for I have ridden alone over many weary miles of the desert, and the face of a friend is a welcome sight to lonesome eyes. With whom do you abide in this place?"

I led the way to the house of Ho-leka, and Lo-To-Kah, who was well-known there, was received as a welcome and honoured guest. Food was spread, after which tobacco and corn leaves were brought, and then our old host and his family clustered about the room, and listened to the talk of the old wanderer until far into the night. Then, one by one, they went to their couches, until all were gone but Lo-To-Kah and myself. When we were left alone the old man sat in silence for a long time, and then he said:

"Now, friend of mine, will I tell you of Raymeya, the witch, as I promised to you when last we met.

"I am just come from Moqui—the land once known to the whites by the name af Tusayan—where I went to assist in the dread dance of the snakes. Although not a Moquino, I am a priest of the Antelope Order, and I was versed in the mysteries of the snake worship before thirty summers had come into my life.

"The spirits of birth gave me a wandering foot, and many times have I been absent from the snake dance because I was journeying in the far places of the world. But I went to the dance this year because it is likely to be the last one I shall ever see. My hold on life is now so feeble that when I close my eyes in sleep I know not whether I shall wake in this world of trouble or in the bright land of peace that lies beyond the grave.

"At the snake dance this year I saw Raymeya, the witch, and I say to you that she seemed as young and wondrously fair as she did at a time that is now more than fifty years in the past—a time when she came to me in the forest and besought me to love her. Ah, she is fair! Fairer than any woman that walks upon the earth to-day!

"You are to me a friend, and I believe I have a warm place in your heart. When I am gone from the earth I desire that you will remember me as a man who knew no fear, and as a man who spoke ever in true words.

"After I returned from the great raid against the Navajos I was treated with much honour by my people. War songs were sung about me, the children gazed upon me in awe, and my words were held in high esteem in the councils. I loved the honour and the praise, but more than all things else I loved Zeetah, my wife, and I would leave the councils and the dances and the games of the men to spend the time apart with her. Ah, *amigo mio*, never does a man know the fulness of life till he knows such love as I have known!

"One day in council the old chief of the clan to which I belonged arose in his place and said that he was old, and the days of his life were almost gone, and that before he was gone he desired to surrender his office to a man who was young and strong, and just and fearless, so that the years to come would be good years for his people. Then, while the warriors and the old men held their very breath in silence, he placed his hand upon my head, and asked me to be chief in his stead.

"I was but a youth then, señor; an honour had come to me that many aged men had sought through their lives without finding; but, instead of being pleased, I was so grieved that I almost wept. While I sat in silence, with my eyes cast down, the people began shouting:

"'Lo-To-Kah, the chief! Lo-To-Kah, the chief! We are the warriors of Lo-To-Kah, of the oaken heart, and no people can stand before us!'

"I embraced the old chief and thanked him, and I thanked the warriors who were willing to have me for chief; and then I told them that not yet would I consent to be their chief, but that in six days I would give them an answer. And then I left the council and went to Zeetah.

"We decided that I should go alone into the forest, away from her and away from my people, and there should meditate until I should be guided aright. And I took blankets and a bow and arrows, and I went alone into the depths of the forest.

"I went many miles, and when night came I built a fire and lay down by it to sleep. But I was so lonesome, and longed so much for my wife, that I was minded to go back in the night and tell the people I would not be their chief. But I did not go, and I slept till the sun came up, and then I killed game and cooked it, and sat down to meditate again.

"In this way the days and nights passed, until the sun had risen and set four times, and I had made no choice. Then the night came on again, and I sat by my fire and brooded. It was a night of moonlight, and multitudes of stars shone in the sky above me. Away in the far distance I saw the white-topped mountains that the Spanish people call the Mountains of Silver. Far behind me lay the peaceful valley where my people were encamped, and all about me were the numberless trees of the forest.

"While I sat there musing and gazing away at the mountains, I heard a soft step in the leaves behind me, and before I could fit an arrow to my bow, there stood before me as fair a woman as ever breathed the breath of life. She was a white-skinned woman, and she was clad in finer garments than had ever been seen in the lands of the Indians. Her dress was of white, clinging silk; a black *reboso* was over her head, and on her white neck, and round her arms, and on her fingers, were jewels of such wonderful brightness that scarce could I look upon them. The woman smiled as she gazed upon me, and she said:

"'You are Lo-To-Kah, and you are such a man as I had hoped you would be. I have journeyed great distances to meet you. I have arrayed myself so that I may seem fair in your eyes. Look upon me! Am I not more beautiful than any woman you ever saw?'

"I answered: 'You are arrayed in garments of greater beauty than any I ever saw. You wear stones in which are imprisoned the light of the sun and the splendours of the rainbow. You are fairer than any woman known to me, except Zeetah, my wife. What do you desire of me?'

"The face of the woman became somewhat sad when I spoke with such reverence of my wife, and she gazed upon me for a time in silence. Then she said:

"'Lo-To-Kah, I am the fairest woman upon the earth; and even time and the passing of years cannot mar my beauty. I am wise—wiser even than all of the oldest and wisest men of your tribe, or of all the Indian tribes under the sun. I am rich—so rich that all the wealth of your people would be but a bauble to me. I am great—so great that chiefs are my subjects. What think you of me now?'

"I gave answer that I thought the great Manitou had blessed her beyond all women, and again I asked what she desired of me, and she said:

"'But one thing do I lack, O, Lo-To-Kah, and that thing I seek from you. I am known to many of the greatest men in the world, and they seek me for lover or wife; but I care not for them, for they are proud, or vain, or false, or have the hearts of cowards. I long for a man in whose heart fear is not; a man who stakes his life upon his promise; a man who is so great that he can rule even me, who am a ruler.

"'Among tribes far from here I heard of you—for the fame of your deeds has travelled far—and I came to this land to seek you. I came disguised as a woman of your own nation, and when the people of your kind, who dwell in the North, came to this land to dance, I was with them. I have watched you since then; I have come to believe that you are the man of men, and now I seek from you the only thing my life needs to make it complete. The thing I seek from you is love.'

"Remember, señor, that at that time I had never journeyed among the white people; I knew not of their ways, and I thought of women in the way my people thought of them. Among my people a man is much greater than a woman, and, too, a man often has many wives. Many of the women of my nation had sought to be my wife, and the offer of the white woman did not then seem to me so great a thing as I now know it to have been. I answered her, and said:

"'In the encampment of my tribe there stands a *can-nee*, made of the hides of buffalo, that is larger than any of the other *can-nees*. In it dwells a woman who is fairer and dearer than any other woman of my nation. The *can-nee* is mine, and the woman is my wife. The woman is so dear to me that I have promised her, and have promised myself, to have no other wife than she. Many men in my tribe have more wives than one; and among our men are many who will be glad to take you. Go to them.'

"The woman gazed upon me with a strange look upon her face. She folded her arms, and stood for a time in silence, and then she said:

"'You are but a simple Indian, and you know not what you say. I would not live an instant in a *can-nee* with a man who had another wife. Who loves me must love me—only.'

"I answered: 'I love only Zeetah, my wife. No lips but hers have ever pressed my lips in love, and so it shall be till the day of my death.'

"Then was the woman angered, and she said: 'Fool. you know not what you say. I have untold wealth, great knowledge, great power. I can fulfil your every hope. Why am I not better for you than a wild Indian woman? I can take you to the ends of the earth; with me you can live in a palace and be attended by slaves. But if you care not for such things, I, too, will live with you as an Indian woman, if you will but cast off this Zeetah, and take me for your wife.'

"I answered the woman not at all; and then she seated herself by my side and told me she would always be young and fair. That failed; and then she told me a strange tale of the Sierra Madre Mountains, a city of wise Indians who had great houses and heaps of gold, and great wealth in such jewels as she wore.

"She said that she was the queen of that people, and if I would go with her I might be their king. Then she told me many tales of the far countries of the world, and of the great oceans, and of the mighty ships, and of the cities whose size is so great that they stretch away farther than the sight of a man can carry. She said she had seen all those places and lands and wonders, and would take me to them if I would go. But I still refused, and I would have refused if she had offered me the world and all it contains. The woman again became angered, and she said:

"'What, then, if this precious Zeetah of yours should die? Would you then refuse me?'

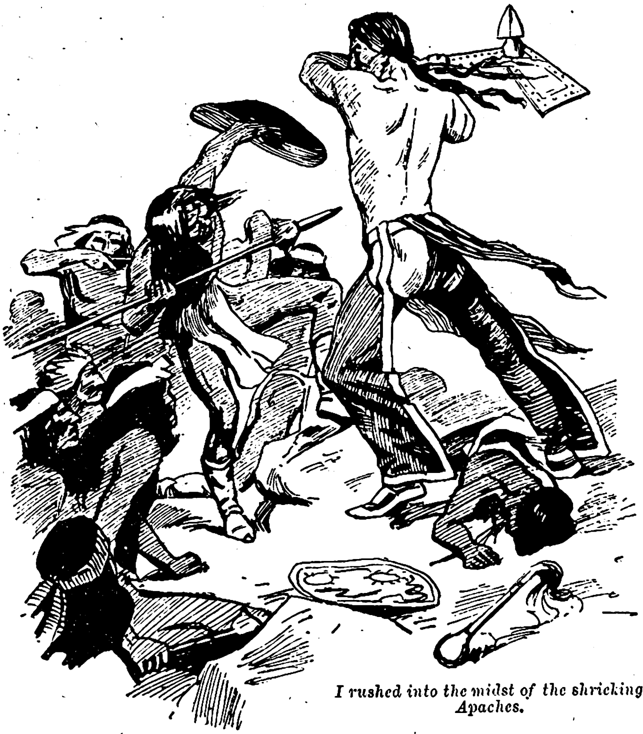
"My heart was filled with trouble, for I feared the woman might work harm upon my wife; and I told her that if as much as one hair upon my Zeetah's head was harmed, I would know it to be her work, and that I would seek her till I found her, and would kill her.

"The woman smiled, and told me I could not kill her. Then she became sad, and she gazed upon me a long, long time, and she spoke no word. But in time she roused herself, and said:

"'I have journeyed over the world seeking the man of men, and until I met you I had not found him. And now that I have found you, I learn in bitterness that you are not for me. Fear not for your Zeetah; I will do her no evil. See; I have here a charm that is revered among all Indians. If your Zeetah is ever in trouble I will lend her this, and thus show you that I hold your happiness even above my own.'

"From a fold in her robe the woman drew forth the dried dead body of a two-headed rattlesnake, a charm that is sacred among all Indians, no matter of what tribe they are. It is the holiest emblem we know, and fortunate is the man whose privilege it is to see it. A two-headed snake is born but once in a hundred years, and it is sent to earth by Chah-Now-Woof, the Great Spirit himself. While it lives it is devoutly worshipped, and when it is dead, its dried body is so potent a token that no Indian will harm any man or woman who has it. With such an emblem, *amigo*, you could journey to the uttermost ends of the lands that the Indians know, and all men would do you homage.

"With such an emblem I could journey through the heart of a land of foes, every warrior of which might be thirsting for my blood, and no harm would be done me. I asked the woman to allow me to touch the snake, for one had never been seen by any man of my tribe. And because I touched it is one of the reasons that life has gone so well with me.



I rushed into the midst of the shrieking Apaches.

"Then I asked the white woman her name, and when she told me I gazed upon her in awe and wonder, for the name she gave me was the name of the Great Witch of the South, whose fame is known to every Indian man of magic that dwells upon the earth. She said her name was Raymeya! When she spoke her name I cast down my eyes in reverence. And when I looked again the woman was gone. It seemed as though she had melted into the air. I did not see her again until more than five and twenty years had gone into the past.

"After the woman was gone I again meditated as to becoming chief, but six days passed and I had not made a decision. I returned to the encampment of my people, and before I had been there long, the question was decided for me. I found my people in great uproar, for a runner had come to the camp, bearing the tidings that a band of Apaches was coming down upon us, wearing their war paint, and saying they would wipe our warriors from the face of the earth, steal our horses, and take our women for slaves.

"I had not been in my *can-nce* an hour, when the warriors of my tribe came and called me, and told me I must be their chief, for the old chief was ill in his tent, and unless I guided them they would all be killed. Thus was the matter decided for me; my duty became greater than my desire, and I told the people I would be their chief.

"Then sacred *po-o-kante* was made by our men of medicine, war paint was donned, the feathers of eagles were fastened in our hair, and we danced the war dance and sang the old war songs of our people while we awaited the coming of the Apaches. It was not long till they came, but they came like snakes and not like men. They tried to deceive us, and cause us to follow a few of them in one direction, while the others stole upon us from behind our backs to kill us.

"I had fought battles with the Apaches before, and when a few of them fired arrows upon us from the south, I directed my men to stand firm and not to follow them. The numbers of the Apaches were very many, and soon they ceased trying to decoy us and charged down upon us, thinking we would flee before their great numbers and leave our women behind; but we stood side by side, as the white soldiers do when they fight, and we all shot our arrows at once.

"My men were brave, and they stood by me till many an Apache fiend had bit the dust; but soon the Apache fiends crowded upon us in such great numbers that my men were forced backwards step by step. Soon we had gone backward so far that we found we could not go farther without exposing our women and children to danger, and at that place I told my men to halt and fight till they were killed.

"Then we fought such a battle as was never before known even to the oldest men of my tribe. The Apaches are like reptiles, and they like not to stand on their feet and fight like men; but we killed so many of them that they went mad with anger, and they crowded upon us like hordes of demons.

"When the fight began I had with me a hundred young men. Soon ten of them were dead, then ten more, and then they fell dead about me as the trees fall in the face of a mountain storm. It seemed to me that soon we should all be killed, and I thought of the Apaches bearing away our women to make slaves of them.

"I thought of my Zeetah being forced to dwell with some Apache brute, and the thought made me so wild that I forgot all danger; I shouted the terrible war-cry of my people, and I rushed into the midst of the shrieking Apaches, swinging my giant club as I went. I smote the Apaches to the right, and a man fell dead. I smote them to the left, and another of them bit the dust. I smote them on all sides, and as I smote they fell before me. But all the time they crowded upon me closer and closer, and it seemed that my life could not last as long as it takes a man to breathe. All about me was a sea of writhing, up-turned faces, and a multitude of arms reaching out to deal me the blow of death.

"In my youth I had learned the whirling dance, a dance in which one whirls upon his heel, going round so swiftly that scarcely can an onlooker see his face. When I was sorely pressed by the Apaches I thought of my skill in that dance, and I resolved to make it serve me, I whirled my club so fast that soon I had an open space about me, and then I spun upon my heel, and as I spun I swung my club. I went so fast that my club sped through the air, making a noise like the rushing of many waters. The Apaches had never seen such a sight, and as they saw their warriors fall dead before my terrible club they became afraid, and they shouted:

"'This man cannot be killed! This man bears a charmed life! He must be Chah-Now-Woof, and we cannot harm him. Let us flee, or he will kill us all!'

"I knew not where my own men were, for I had gone into the midst of the Apaches. And as the Apaches turned and fled I pursued them, and I dealt a blow of death at every step. The hot blood from gaping wounds spurted into my face, but I heeded not. The shrieks of a score of dying men rent my ears, but I heeded not. Writhing men who were dying upon the ground rose up and struck at me with their clubs, but I heeded not.

"And making the war cry of my nation sound wildly through the forest, I sped on after the fleeing Apaches, and when they were all gone from before me I was a great distance from the encampment of my people. I was bleeding from a dozen wounds, a hundred arrows had pierced my flesh, but so great had been my rage that I had not felt the stings of my wounds until I stopped to rest.

"I made my way back to the place where the camp of my people had been, and as I went my path was strewn with the dead and dying Apaches whom I had slain. One dying man raised himself upon his elbow, and tried to send an arrow through me, but I jeered at him and went on. And when I came to the place where the homes of my tribe had been, I saw a sadder sight than my eyes had ever looked upon.

"The *can-nees* of my people had been burned to the ground; the dead bodies of little children were burning in the fires of the tents, and the bravest and best warriors of my nation were strewn over the place, cold and stark in the grasp of death.

"And as I went towards the place that had been my home, I came upon the body of my young brother—a brave boy whom I had loved next to my wife, and as I saw him lying cold and still in death, I broke down and wept as weeps a babe.

"I lifted his stiff body in my arms and caressed him, and then I took a vow to kill half a hundred Apache fiends to avenge his death. Then in sorrow I went on, and when I reached my *can-nee*, I found it half burnt to the ground, and when I looked within I found it empty."

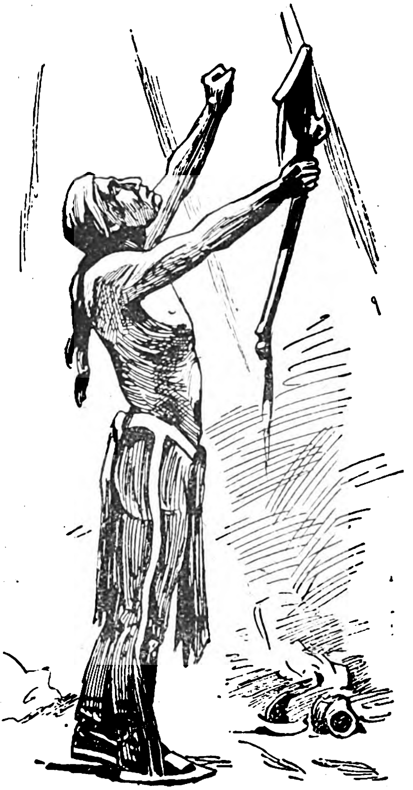
When the old man reached this place in his tale, a sigh burst from his lips, his wrinkled old face went down into his palms, and for many minutes he did not speak. But the sad spell soon left him, and he continued:

"I went within the ruined remnant of my home, and in the ground that was the floor I found little furrows that I knew had been made by the feet of my wife as she was dragged resisting from her home by the naked fiends who had stolen her. And then I turned my face to the sky, and I vowed to Chah-Now-Woof himself that I would spend my life in avenging the wrong done to my wife.

"I found that part of the Apache band had crept away from the ones I fought, and had gone round our camp and set fire to our *can-nees*, and killed some women and children; and that they were preparing to steal all our women, when my men had turned upon them, and forced them to fly for life. But before they were forced to fly they had stolen my Zeetah, and she was the only one of our women they had taken.

"I found that many of our bravest and best warriors had been killed. I found that the old man who had been chief for many years was gone. But the troubles of my people did not rest so heavily upon me as did the sorrow of losing my wife.

"The women cut their hair and wailed in sorrow, and the men sang the song of death, and gathered our dead friends together to prepare them for the journey to the Happy Hunting Grounds. And while the rites of death were going on, I donned fresh paint, I filled my quiver with fresh arrows, I packed some dried meat in my pouch, and I started away in the track of the Apaches who had stolen all that the world held that was dear to me.



I turned my face to the sky.

"At first the trail was clear, but after a day's journey I found that I must contend with the cunning of the Apaches, who are more cunning than serpents; for the trails seemed to divide and go in all directions. Then the trails seemed to disappear and to fade from the ground. But I had tracked Apaches when I was but a boy, and I followed them as surely as though the way was an open road before me.

"They had gone with the speed of the wind, and I followed them over the mountains and across the deserts for many, many weary days.

"I went by day and by night, and, at last, in the dead time of a moonless night, I came within sight of the rancheria of the Apaches. O, Chah-Now-Woof, sweet is revenge! When I saw the Apache encampment I forgot that I was weary, and was again a strong man and a chief. I crawled upon my hands and feet, gliding as silently as a serpent glides, and soon I was among the miserable tents of my foes. I went from one tent to another, listening, for I thought I would know my Zeetah even by her soft breath as she slept. At last I came to a tent larger than any of the others, and there I heard a sound that sent my heart into my mouth. It was the voice of Zeetah, who talked as she slept. I listened, and heard her say:

"'Lo-To-Kah, dear one, I have had an evil dream. I dreamt I was stolen from your side. Oh, Lo-To-Kah, take me closer in your arms!'

"Then my eyes were wet with tears. I scratched upon the wall of the tent to awaken her, and soon I knew she was awake, for she spoke in fright. I whispered to her, telling her I was Lo-To-Kah, and asking her to steal out to me if she were not bound. Soon she came, silently creeping to me, and I took her in my arms and kissed her as a mother might kiss a loved child who had come back to her from the grave. And then, as she was weak from so much fear and excitement, I took her in my arms and bore her away into the depths of the forest; and as I bore her I saw that she held some strange object in her hands.

"When we reached a safe place in the forest Zeetah showed me the dried body of the two-headed snake, and told me that while the battle had raged hottest a strange woman with a white skin had crept into our *can-nee* and given her the emblem, and then faded as though she had gone up in smoke.

"Zeetah knew of the snake emblem, and she had carried it with her, and because she had borne it she had not been harmed even though she was among the brute Apaches.

"Then Zeetah and I crept back to the camp of the Apaches, and we went to the tent where she had been a prisoner, which was the tent of the head chief. We crept inside, making no noise, and we found the chief still sleeping. Before he awoke a gag was in his mouth, and I threw him across my shoulder and bore him away into the forest, Zeetah following after me.

"It would have been no wrong thing to have killed him as one would kill a serpent; but when we were in the forest I unbound him. I placed his battle-club in his hands, and I told him to fight for his life, as he and I would never both go forth alive. The battle was fierce, but it was short, and when it was done, the Apaches lacked a chief.

"I knew it was Raymeya, the witch, who had come to my *can-nee*, and given the charm to my wife; but I told my wife nothing of her. And one day after that I came home from a hunt, and found my wife looking as though she was in trouble, and when I asked the cause, she said that the strange white woman had come again, and had taken away with her the dried snake. Zeetah asked me if the woman were a mortal or a spirit, and I replied that I did not know. And I do not know unto this day.

"From that time on I did not see the witch again for many long years. My wife died, I tired of this land, and as I have told you before, I learnt the speech of the white-skinned people, and journeyed among them with a show. I went to many cities and many places, and in time our show crossed the ocean and went to the land called Europe.

"Never in my life was I so lonely as I was on the day when we sailed away on the big ship, and set out into the the heart of the ocean.

"We journeyed through the land of France, and through the lands of Italy and Germany, and then we went to England. There the people went wild over us, and multitudes of them came every day to see the Indians.

"Deerfoot, the Seneca, was with us—he who was in his time the mightiest and fleetest runner in the world.

"The English people numbered among them one who was a mighty runner, and he desired to try his speed with that of Deerfoot. The race was arranged to take place in a great arena, and on the appointed day a vast concourse of people assembled. The white man was a fleet runner, going with the speed of an antelope; but he was no match for Deerfoot, who sped away like the wind. Away they went, ten times round the great race course; and Deerfoot won as easily as a coyote would win against a mongrel dog.

"The race set my blood to boiling, and I yearned to do something myself to show the white people that we children of the forests and plains were not their inferiors. I mounted the stand of the judges, and I challenged any white man there to wrestle with me for a stake of a thousand English pounds.

"The English people are famed for athletic skill, and in that audience of people were the famed boxers, and runners, and wrestlers of the nation. My offer was taken at once, and soon there stepped into the arena a man who seemed to be stronger than the strongest horse. The people shouted, and I said the match should take place at once, and I stripped off my outer garments and stepped to the side of the man. He shook my hand according to the custom of the white nations, and at once we began the battle.

"Before I was aware the man had grasped me, and he strove to throw me over his head and make short work of the match; but I am an Indian, and while he was striving with all his might I slipped through his iron hands and stood free upon the ground. Then, while he was gaping in wonder, I grasped him in such a way that he could scarcely move either hand or foot, I raised him high above my head, I bore him half round the arena, and then I pitched him away from me and he fell twenty feet from where I stood.

"The people went almost wild with excitement; they pressed about me and shook my hand till I thought they would wring it loose from my arm, for I had thrown the greatest and strongest wrestler that had ever been known in England. Then a man who was a prince came to me, and he invited Deerfoot and me to go to his palace to a banquet that he would give in our honour.

"I cared little to go to the banquet of the great man, for such things are little to my taste. But my companions urged me, and I went. There were ladies at the banquet, many of them attired in rich robes, and with their white necks gleaming like ivory.

"Deerfoot and I donned the full dress of the white men, and when the night was growing old I was called upon to make a speech. I stood up and talked to the white people, and much applause was bestowed upon me.

"But while I was speaking I glanced along the table and my speech stopped short, because I saw the two brightest eyes in the world gazing into mine. I knew the eyes were those of the witch Raymeya, and I spoke no more, although the guests wondered much. And when I knew she was there the minutes seemed like days, and as soon as I could I hastened away.

"The next day the witch came to see me. She seemed as young as she did that day so long before, when she surprised me in the forest, but she seemed sadder and more gentle. She took my hand and held it to her lips and kissed it, and then she asked me how life had gone with me since my wife had died, and asked if I were happy. I told her that life was good, but that it no longer seemed so sweet to me as in those older days when I was chief among my own people in the mountains, and that most of the joy of my life had gone out with the breath of my wife. And then she said, almost in a whisper:

"'And you have not changed your mind concerning the matter of which I spoke to you in the forest?'

"I told her no, and for a long time she gazed mutely upon the ground. As she gazed upon the ground I regarded her, and never have the eyes of men looked upon a fairer being. In Europe I saw fine pictures of angels, and her features were like unto the features in the pictures. I was saddened, too, to think that such a creature was doomed to go childless and loveless through life, and in sorrow for her tears came to my eyes. I turned my head away, and when I turned again the woman was gone. She had vanished, seemingly into thin air, just as she had done before.

"From that time on the witch was much in my mind, and many times in the night I woke to find that I had been dreaming of her. It seemed to me that in my sleep she came and stood by my couch and gazed on me, with her great bright eyes all filled with love; and she seemed to point to the west, as though bidding me to go again to the land of my own people.

"In time I went again to the land of my own people. I forsook the cities and the ways of the white-skinned races, I donned again the garments of my tribe, and I said to myself that with the people of my own blood I would spend the sundown of my life. I hunted with the young men of my tribe, I went to Moqui to the dance of the snakes, I journeyed among the tribes whose lands lie round about the lands of my own tribe.

"In time the life of my people palled upon me. On every hand were the forts that held the white-skinned soldiers; no more rode our young men forth to battle, and when I was surfeited with weariness I chose a strong horse and set out alone to journey to the hidden valleys that lie locked fast in the Sierra Madres, whereof the great Witch of the South was queen.

"And in time I came to lands that I had not seen since the days of my earliest manhood. Soon I was in an unknown land, and was journeying in the lands that belong to the fierce Yaquis.

"Then I came to the region where snow lies for ever on the rocks; and then I was in a region of snow and hail and storms, a desolate region never before trodden by the foot of man or beast. My horse died in that place, and I was almost minded to lie down and die. Yet hope was with me, and I struggled on and on, sometimes falling into a chasm of snow, sometimes stopping to rub my frozen feet and hands, and then going onward, and always up.

"At last, while stones of hail were almost knocking the breath from my body, I came suddenly to a wall of masonry rising out of the snow sheer before me.

"I followed it for many miles, going on long after the storm had ceased; and just as my strength was gone, and I could go no farther, I came to a place where a ladder of raw hide was hanging to the wall. I grasped the ladder, and, with my strength leaving me at every step, I painfully climbed to the top of the wall.

"Friend, the people of your kind believe in a land of Paradise, a land of joy where milk and honey flow, and every grace is known. And I say to you that your land of Paradise can be no fairer than was the land that opened to my astonished view when I had reached the summit of that cruel wall.

"And as I sat and gazed into the valley I knew it to be the land whose people called Raymeya queen, and I felt that the end of my journey was reached. That was the land of which I might have been king; those golden cities might have been mine, and my life might have been lived out in that wondrously beautiful valley, if it had not been for the love I bore for Zeetah.

"Then I climbed off the wall, into the roadway of stone, and started down into the valley. Soon I was stopped by a bronze warrior, who carried a silver spear. In a tongue that I did not know he said words to me, and when I answered him in the Spanish speech he shook his head in perplexity, and gazed on me in wonder. But he answered me in the same tongue, and he lowered his spear and walked by my side, and together we went down the winding roadway that led into the valley.

"When we came to the level land we met men and women and children, and they all stopped and gazed on me, and asked questions of my guide. I was truly in a sorry state; my clothes were worn out, my hands and feet were frozen and swollen, and my face and body were covered with scratches and bruises. And thus, hungry, naked, penniless, and ill, I was led into that golden city of which I might have been the ruler.

"I was being led to a prison that was kept for such wandering Indians as found their way into the valley; but as we were passing a palace of marble I saw the eyes of Raymeya gaze out from a window. At first she did not see me, but soon her eyes fell upon me, and then she called to the officer who was guiding me, telling him to stop. He stopped, and stood mutely by my side; and soon another officer came, and ordered that I should be taken before the queen.

"I led was through the palace grounds, into the apartment of the queen, and she rose from her place and ordered that I be left alone with her. When we were alone, the queen knelt at my side; she took my hand in hers, and her eyes were aflame with joy. She said:

"'And have you come to me at last, O, Lo-To-Kah? The time has been long, the years have passed on leaden feet; but I endured, because I believed that in time you would come.'

"I said to her: 'Raymeya, he who stands before you is an old man, whose days to live are few. I came to this place because I am tired of the land of my own people; but I came to seek no bride. I have a bride who waits for me in a land as fair as is this land of yours.'

"Raymeya rose and looked upon me in sorrow; and she was not one day older than when she came to me in the depths of the forest, or when I saw her in the greatest city of the world. The years had gone on, changing babes to men, and men back to earth; but the hand of time had not fallen on the fair face or form of the witch who was ever young.

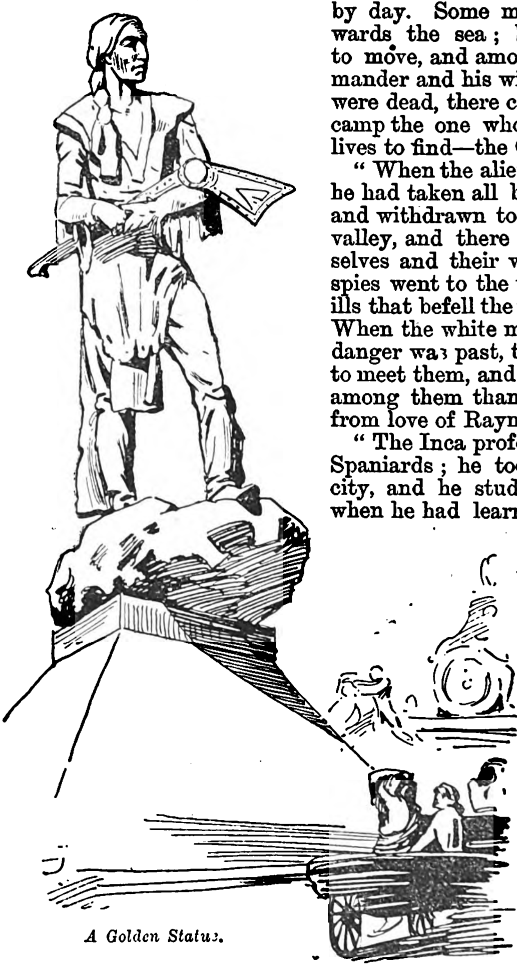
"We seated ourselves, and drank wine; and we talked for many hours, and when we had finished, Raymeya was my friend, and she no longer craved my love. I told her all the tale of my journey through life. I told her that never could I love any woman but the one who had been my wife; and she said it was well, and that she would speak to me no more of love. Then she gazed into my face for a long time, her eyes filled with tears; and then she rose and walked up and down the room, moaning to herself. But soon she became quiet; she smiled, and laid her hand on my shoulder, and called me friend. And from that time forth she spoke no more of love.

"I was tired and hungry, and the queen ordered attendants to bathe me, and to give me food and garments; and when I was dressed, and had eaten, I lay down and slept for many hours.

"The next day I walked with the queen through the streets of her city, and wherever we went the people bowed in reverence. Soon we were tired, and as the queen waved her hand a chariot, drawn by four horses, came to our side. We entered the chariot, and the queen ordered the driver to go to the Plaza of the Statues.

"The Plaza of the Statues was a circular place, hemmed in with palaces of marble, and in the place golden statues were scattered about, intermingled with statues carved in the purest white. In the centre was a golden statue, towering above the others. It was of beaten gold, and when I gazed upon it I almost fainted with wonder, for the statue was of myself as I was when a young man. The habiliments were those of my people, and a mighty club was in the hands.

"'That,' said the queen, pointing to the golden statue of myself, 'is the image of the king of this land, the king who never came to claim his own.'



A Golden Statue.

"The eyes of the queen filled with tears, and we drove in silence away from that place. The matter of the statue troubled me, and from the time I had seen it I yearned to leave that fair city and go again to live out the remnant of my life in the rude land of my own people.

"And on the next day I said to the queen: 'O, Raymeya, tell me now the tale of your life, the tale you promised me so long ago in the forests that cover the mountains of the La Platas. Let me know the truth of the mystery of your life, and your endless youth, and your changeless beauty; and then let me go out of your land and out of your life, and let me go back to the land where I was born. I am but a wild man, and I am out of place among the splendours of your royal city. You have a warm place in my heart; you seem at once my daughter and my friend, but it is best that I abide not here with you.'

"And the queen told me the tale of her life. She said that she was born in Spain, before the time when Columbus sought the Western world. She was the daughter of a pirate, and in her early life she felt great remorse for the life that was lived by herself and her people, and she entered a convent as a nun. There she fell in love with a priest, and in order not to lay herself open to reproach, she stole away at night and fled from the convent.

"At that time South America was the haven for all men of adventurous spirits, and at the time she fled from the convent a fleet was fitting out to sail to that land to seek for a land of gold, whose fame had reached earlier explorers. She went to the admiral of the fleet and begged that he would take her with him, and the admiral became enamoured of her beauty, and begged her to go as his wife. They were married before they sailed, and she landed on the western shores as a wife.

"In America the pioneers were wild over the tales of El Dorado, the Gilded Chief of the land of Cundinamarca, a man who was said to have so much gold that his house was built of it, and his body was powdered afresh each day with gold dust. Raymeya's husband set out to find that land, and his wife went with him. And after months of hardship they came to the plain of Cundinamarca, and they found only a village of seemingly wild Indians, who had no gold, and who fought like demons. And the Indians said there was no Gilded Chief.

"The land of Cundinamarca seemed to be full of curses for the Spaniards, and fevers and pestilence came upon them, and death abode in their camps by night and by day. Some made their way back towards the sea; but many were too ill to move, and among those were the commander and his wife. When all but a few were dead, there came to their miserable camp the one whom they had sold their lives to find—the Golden King himself.

"When the aliens had entered his land, he had taken all but a few of his people, and withdrawn to an almost inaccessible valley, and there they had hidden themselves and their wealth. But every day spies went to the valley, and told of the ills that befell the white-skinned invaders. When the white men were so few that all danger was past, the king had gone forth to meet them, and no sooner had he come among them than his heart caught fire from love of Raymeya.

"The Inca professed great love for the Spaniards; he took them to his hidden city, and he studied their speech. And when he had learned to talk with them, he sought to win Raymeya for his bride.

"At first she refused, but he showed her his vast stores of gold and precious gems, and she sold her honour for a price. The warriors of the Inca then fell upon the Spaniards and killed all but the commander; and with her own hands Raymeya slew her husband that she might be free from him, and free to wed the Golden Chief.

"Raymeya told me that in the grey dawn of the next morning after she had killed her husband while she was lying with staring, sleepless eyes by the side of the sleeping Inca, the miracle took place that in South America is still remembered, and is called the miracle of Our Lady of the Wilderness. The apparition of an angel formed before the eyes of Raymeya, the angel's hands were pointed at her, and then these words were said:

"'O sinner, viler than the work of a fiend has been your deed this night. To gain wealth and place you have taken human life, and the souls of your victims are now in Purgatory. Until the last one of those souls is freed you shall not grow old, and the passing of time shall harm you not; but you shall be denied the blessing of death. And you shall wander over the earth, seeking something you shall not find, and bearing the memory of this time with you for ever!'

"Thus it is that Raymeya is ever young and ever fair, thus it is that she wanders over the earth, seeking love and finding it not; thus it is that she is the most unhappy woman who breaths the sweet air that the Great Spirits have given to the children of men.

"In time the Inca died. During the long, almost countless years that have been from then till now, Raymeya gained wisdom and the wealth that is now hers. Long ago she found the hidden valley in the Sierra Madres, occupied then by a tribe as wild as the Yaquis.

"Because they could not kill her they made her their queen, and she wrought with them and their children, and the children of their children's children, until the result is that her people are a wise and learned people, who dwell in a golden city in the fairest valley on the earth. She has taught her people all things except knowledge of the world; but she never allows them to journey beyond the mountains that shut in their valley.

"She herself wanders up and down the earth, appearing sometimes in a wild camp, disguised as an Indian woman, then going as a great lady in the courts of kings, and sometimes going as a nun to nurse the dying when the great wars are raging. But all the time she bears in her bosom a heart that is on fire, and joy is a thing that is not known to her."

Lo-To-Kah abruptly ceased speaking; he rolled a cigarette and lighted it, and then he walked up and down the room and smoked, his head low in thought. When he had finished smoking he sat down again and began talking. He said:

"Friend, when you think of all the blessings the Great Spirits have given to us of earth, remember that the greatest of all is death. It is the end of trouble, the ceasing for ever of evil doing. It will come to me soon, and may come to you also at any time, for a man's life is but as a breath of air. My mind now is often filled with thoughts of a fair land that I shall soon journey in, a land as fair as the land where Raymeya rules, but a land where no-one's heart is like a stinging adder."

The old man spread his blanket on the floor, and it was not long till I also slept, for the night was almost gone.

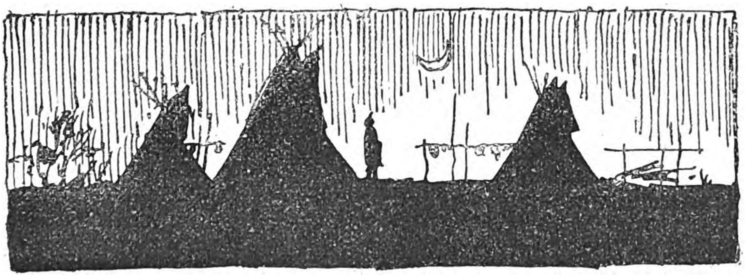
In the morning I studied the old Indian with new interest. He had travelled so far and wide, and he was so much wiser than the men of his race, and it seemed strange that he should believe such strange, weird tales as the one he had told me the night before.

I hoped he would speak further about the witch, but he did not mention her, and seemed to forget that he had spoken of her, or that such a person lived. He told me old tales of the long ago; he described the "outfits" that used to journey down the trail to Santa Fé before the railways were built, and he discussed the various army officers who had fought in the West.

The day was hot, and I slept an hour after noon. When I awoke and went outside I found the old chief on his pony, waiting to bid me farewell. He said:

"Being in this place has brought to my memory other places where the Pueblo peoples dwell, and has made me long to see the great rock of Acoma once more before I die. I am going there now. May health and joy be with you. *Adios!*"

V. Z. Reed.



A QUEEN OF THE SAWDUST.

It was early in June when Ivan Romanyi, the lion tamer, came to me for leave to go to his uncle, who was dying, and who had sent for him. It was quite a journey north, but I think Romanyi expected some sort of a legacy, and wanted to be on hand. Our season was just beginning, and we expected a new lion from Hamburg, so that it was most inconvenient to let him go, and I gave my consent unwillingly.

The only thing that surprised me was that he should leave Rose, even for so short a time; for since the day she came to us he had been her shadow. I have seen a good many strange things in my life, but nothing stranger than this union of Rose Lynch and Ivan Romanyi. It is true Romanyi was a handsome, black-eyed fellow, with a magnificent physique, and a warm, generous heart; but he had a fearful temper, and was as jealous as a fiend. He would have fits of sullen rage that made even the roughest women amongst us fight shy of him, for when he was angry he would rave and storm, and woe betide anyone that came in his way.

Rose Lynch was marvellously pretty. She was English by birth, and had the fair skin and colouring of her country, and a mass of reddish-gold hair that looked like bits of molten fire. Her slight, pliant figure was grace itself, and her manner quiet and well-bred. Despite her rough knockabout existence, no one would ever have believed her to be a circus rider. Romanyi loved her with that insane passion that brooks no denial. How he won her we never knew, but she accepted his fierce caresses quietly, and even in his worst moods she had no fear of him, for he was never rough to her. At the mere sound of her voice his frowns and scowls would disappear, and instead of the surly, brutal lion-tamer, he would be a passionate-eyed Hungarian lover.

He left Rose unwillingly enough. I think the night he bade us good-bye it must have almost broken his heart; his face was grey, and his eyes blazed like small fires under his black brows. Rose was as quiet and indifferent as usual, and did not seem to be sorry or rejoice at his going. He had quite a journey before him, and during his absence Fritz, the under tamer, took charge of the lions.

Rose was our *première* rider, and she was a universal favourite, and was always received with wild applause wherever we went.

I have never seen a woman ride as she did, or dare the feats that seemed mere child's play to her. As I said, she was a very beautiful woman at any time, but when she came into the ring in her soft gauze skirts, her exquisite arms and neck bare, her glorious hair over her shoulders, she was a vision no man that has ever seen her will forget. I had been very busy, and had not been back in the tent for a week, when one night, Martin, the ringmaster, beckoned to me before the performance. "What's up with Rose?" he said cautiously. I looked at him inquiringly.

"Haven't you seen her new outfit?" he asked. I shook my head, and just then the bell sounded and he left me. I walked back to the dressing tent, and crossed over to Rosie's corner and called her. She pushed the curtains aside and came out to me, and I saw what Martin meant. She had discarded her gauze skirts, and was dressed simply, but superbly, in a blue cloth habit, with a jacket that fitted her body closely, and the orthodox English tile on her blonde head. Her small hands and feet were perfectly gloved and booted, and she swung a riding crop in her hand. She had never looked more beautiful; her sweet face and slim throat rose like a flower out of its dark setting.

"What a stunning get-up, Rosie," I said.

She smiled uneasily, and then she said softly:

"Dick"—we were great friends, Rosie and I—"Dick, don't I look better so? More, more"—she hesitated—"like other women?"

She looked at me anxiously.

"You couldn't look like other women, my girl," I said lightly, and then, before she had time to answer, a young fellow walked towards her who had come through the side entrance, and, despite my orders to admit no one, here he was in the dressing-tent. He looked a boy about twenty, from his dress and manners evidently one of the upper ten, and as clean and as handsome a chap as you would wish to see. His hair was as fair as Rosie's own, and he was straight-limbed and broad-shouldered and tall, a splendid specimen of our young Englishmen. As he took off his hat to Rose her face flushed scarlet from brow to chin. It startled me so that I stared at her like a fool. She introduced me to him after a moment.

"Dick, this is Mr. Langdon, a friend of mine. Our manager, Mr. Bradley, Mr. Langdon."

And that was the first inkling I had of it. And then she came close to me, and said: "Be nice to him, Dick, for my sake, and, remember, he knows nothing."

I presume I gaped like an idiot. I couldn't believe it was Rose—Rose whom we called cold and indifferent—Rose whom no man ever seemed to have any effect upon—and here was this slip of a boy. When she came into the ring Langdon and I stood and watched her. For a moment the crowd did not know her in her new dress, and then they thundered applause at her. She never rode more madly, more superbly. Langdon's eyes shone; his face was flushed with pleasure.

"Isn't she wonderful?" he demanded of me. He was oblivious to anything or anybody, and after that one question waited breathlessly until she came back to us. She stood with him a little apart from me, waiting for her second entrance, and I heard him say to her: "Darling, how good of you to get this dress to please me. Now I know you love me."

To say that I felt stunned will not express it—I was ready to believe myself drunk or insane. It seemed incredible. But there stood Rose, looking eagerly into that boy's face, her lips and cheeks radiant as I had never seen them before, her voice indistinctly soft. I thought of Romanyi, and shuddered at the thought.

The new lion arrived, as ill-luck would have it, just at this time, and a viciously ugly brute he was, too. Fritz seemed quite unable to manage him, and I wished Ivan back a hundred times.

Langdon came each day, and Rose was uneasy and restless until she saw him. It was a boy's first love, and he gloried in the fact that we all knew it. Martin told me it was causing no end of talk, and small wonder, to anyone who knew Rose and Romanyi.

But one night as I was sitting alone at my desk, Rose swung the curtain aside and came in. She still had on her riding habit, and her long hair was uncovered, and she looked as white as marble.

Before I realised what she was doing, she threw herself down beside my chair, and, leaning her head against my knee, sobbed wildly. "Why, Rose," I said soothingly, "what is it, my girl?"

"Dick," she said, "this is killing me. What shall I do? You tell me, Dick. You have always been good to me, and I can trust you. You know (shuddering) Ivan will soon return. What shall I do then, Dick? What am I to say to him, I, whom he loves more than anything in the world? I thought I could break it off any time, and yet now I seem bound hand and foot.

"And Horace Langdon has shown me how I can love! He thinks I am the best and purest of women. He wouldn't believe an angel from heaven against me, Dick, and I love him better than my life! Horace loves me, and asks me to be his wife. Me! Rose Lynch—Ivan's sweetheart! Aren't you sorry for me, Dick? What shall I do?" She swayed to and fro.

"Are you afraid of Ivan?" I asked. She shook her head.

"Ivan wouldn't hurt me," she said; "he would tell me to go and be happy. If it killed him he'd tell me. It isn't of Ivan I'm thinking, it's of Horace, I can't wreck his life, and he won't take no for an answer; he thinks I am so good and true to him. Help me, Dick!"

Poor Rose. It made my heart ache to look at her. I took her back to her tent, and quieted her sobs as best I could, and the next day she was dry-eyed, but white as the dead. Langdon came as usual, during the afternoon performance, and had a long talk with her. When he left, Rose looked as if she would faint. Her eyes had great dark circles round. When I told her I had had a telegram from Romanyi, and that he would reach us for the evening, a red spot burnt in each cheek, but she did not answer me.

When night came and the big tent was crowded, I walked back to see how Rose was. Langdon was waiting for her also. When she came towards us I saw that for the first time since he had asked her not to wear them she had put on her short gauze skirts and tights again. His eyes contracted suddenly.

"What does this mean, Rose?" he asked.

She went over to him. We were quite alone in the small entry between the ring and the dressing-tent, and screened by the draught curtains. They had forgotten that I was there. As Rose reached him he put out his arms and closed them round her suddenly.

"Are you doing it to try me, dear?" he said. "Have you forgotten your promise?"

She shook her head.

"Tell me you will let me take you away from it all, Rose," he said. "I will make life so happy for you; you are not meant to stay here, dear; you are meant for me—to make me happy, and to live with me always." She lay in his arms, silently, the world forgotten. Langdon's lips met hers. "My wife," he whispered. But at that word Rose pushed him away from her.

"Not that, not that," she said unsteadily. "I had forgotten. Do you know Ivan Romanyi, the lion tamer, returns to-night?"

Langdon stared at her blankly.

"Well, what of that?" he asked.

She raised her head and looked him full in the face. I stepped forward to prevent her, but she motioned me back impatiently.

"He is my lover," she said; "he has been for three years."

Langdon gave a faint cry, but then he smiled at her. "You are playing with me, dear," he said; "it cannot be true!"

She turned to me.

"It is true; ask Dick. Dick, tell him; tell him."

Langdon's eyes, heavy with dread, turned towards me. I could not speak to the poor lad. I looked at Rose, but she pointed at me unflinchingly. Then I bowed my head silently for assent. Langdon will not be whiter when he is dead. But he made no sound; he turned and left us. Then I heard Ivan's voice.

Rose gasped for breath wildly.

"Don't let him come near me," she said, and fainted in my arms.

Romanyi came in, his face eager, full of happiness, calling: "Rose, Rose." When he saw her he dropped on his knees and gathered her into his arms silently. When Rose opened her eyes she saw him. His face lighted up with joy and relief. "Rose, my girl," he said passionately, "I will not go again," and, stooping, he kissed her hotly. At the touch of his lips she shuddered and sprang to her feet.

"Do not touch me," she said faintly. He looked at her bewilderedly. Then his face grew dark.

"You do not love me now?" he asked.

He leant against one of the tent supports breathing heavily.

"No, I do not love you any longer," she said slowly.

The colour faded from Romanyi's face, and left it set and grey, like flint. His dark eyes seemed covered with a film, his straight red lips grew blue and pinched. Just then the new lion set up a terrible roaring. It seemed to rouse Ivan.

"It is the new one," he said, his quick ear distinguishing a strange voice among his pets.

"Yes, and an ugly beast he is, too," I said.

Rose turned and left us without another word. Walking into the ring Romanyi threw back his head fiercely. "I will go and look at that lion," he said.

I followed him. The beast paced to and fro furious at his imprisonment. The other lions, seeing Ivan, whinnied and howled after him. He turned to me quietly.

"The little Rose has found another to care for," he said, in a curious low tone.

"She has been quite true to you," I replied. His white lips parted over his gleaming teeth, and into his eyes crept that look before which even the lions tremble.

"And for me," he said softly, "for me there is left—what? What is life but Rose? What is love but Rose? Do you think I will let her go from me?"

And then he burst into a storm of silent sobs, which shook his body violently. The lions growled ominously. They were unused to weakness from Romanyi. The new lion roared sullenly. Romanyi took a piece of meat and started towards its cage. I thought he was going to feed it, and stood watching him. He opened the cage door, and stood, his long prod in his hand. The beast crouched, lashing the floor of his cage with his tail.

Romanyi stood erect. As the lion made its leap towards him he turned, and then, to my horror, threw the long prod away from him, and stood waiting. It was all over in a second, and the trainers, who ran in at my cries, covered up his body decently, and threw fresh sand in the cage.

And out in the arena Rose in her pink skirts was riding for the people.

F. Chase.

CONSULTING A FORTUNE-TELLER.

BUSINESS in the printing trade in the otherwise thriving town of Mayneborough was anything but satisfactory. "There are too many of us, I'm thinking," was the comment of Amos Parsons, as, having opened his morning letters, he did not find a single order amongst them, and was wondering how on earth he was going to keep his machines running if things didn't improve.

Just at this moment a smart, well-dressed man entered, and handing over some papers, asked how soon he could have twenty-five thousand circulars announcing a sale of a bankrupt draper's stock.

"When do you want them?" was the reply.

"As quickly as ever you can do them. I want to get them out by to-night's post if possible."

"All right; you shall have them. How's business generally? Things are bad enough in our line, I know."

"Well, I can't grumble; you see, Sellers and Co. are always on the look out for anything likely to attract the public. Now, between you and me, this bankrupt stock I'm advertising is in reality nothing of the kind, but only some odds and ends I happen to have over from last spring; only it tickles the public taste to announce a sale—Alarming Sacrifice! Bankrupt Stock! or Great Fire! Salvage to be sold at an immense reduction—Anything to draw 'em in the place, that's my motto. And now, then, about price for these circulars? I was offered them at eight shillings a thousand. Can you do it a bit finer than that?"

"Eight shillings a thousand! Gad, things must be bad; why, that's almost down to cost."

"Well, here it is, you can see for yourself," handing him an estimate.

"All right; I will do the twenty-five thousand at £9 10s.; anything to keep the machines going; the price can't matter so very much, for if things go on as they're going, I shall have to clear out, that's all about it."

"I say, old man, I'm sorry they're so bad as all that; it seemed to me, judging from the number of people I see come in here of a day, you were doing a roaring trade."

"Agents, sir, agents, every one of them; first it's one thing, then it's another; but these insurance fellows are the worst; I had no less than three of them in here yesterday—two fire, and one life."

"You are insured, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; I had the sense to do that when I came in first, and a pretty penny they charged me for premium."

"And yet yours isn't such a risky business as mine. By Jove! how my stuff would blaze," he added meditatively.

"I don't know about that; you see, there is a lot of oil and cotton waste about; it's wonderful what a lot of the stuff the engines take; it seems as if they must eat it sometimes."

"What do you value your stock at?"

"Oh, I don't know; I insured for two thousand pounds, but I can't see it now," ruefully.

"Don't be down in the dumps over it, things will take a turn before long; why don't you give yourself a holiday for a day or two? Tell you what; when I get this sale well under weigh, I'm going to run up to London for a couple of days; what do you say, will you come?"

"Well, in the present state of business I can't press forward the excuse that I'm too busy! I'll let you know this afternoon, when I deliver these things."

"All right. You come; a bit of a change will do you good."

After considering the matter, Amos Parsons decided to go, being careful to instruct his foreman before going to wire him at once should anything turn up.

Once in London, Mr. Parsons to a certain extent forgot his business troubles, and determined to have a good time of it, as he said.

On the evening of their arrival, his companion made the somewhat sparkling remark that he was going to have his fortune told.

"I thought you had more sense," was the reply.

"Well, I don't know so much about that. The oracle I consult, and I generally give her a look in once or twice a year, has a wonderful knack, or gift, or whatever you like to call it, of foreseeing things—in business, I mean—and only last year she was the means of putting a very comfortable sum to my credit, by advising me to make a big purchase in a particular line, which I did; and it came off trumps, too."

"Well, I hope she will be equally successful this time, that's all."

"Ah! you may laugh, but I know."

An hour or two after Mr. Sellers returned, his face wearing a more than usually satisfied expression.

"Well, what says the oracle this time?"

"Never you mind. I believe she's struck oil; anyway, I'm going to wire my manager to do as she suggests. Why don't you have a try yourself? I mentioned your name to her, and said things had been going bad with you."

"And what did she say?—that there was a bright future in store for me?"

"No," meditatively, "she did not; but she said she was sorry to hear any friend of mine was in low water, and that if you would give her a call she would advise you as to whether it was worth while holding on or not."

"How on earth can she tell? Why, it is simply absurd."

"Absurd or not, when I consulted her first, four years ago, she said: 'Do you know Mayneborough?'

"I said I did."

"Well, what of that?"

"Just this; she said: 'That place is on the move upwards. You go there and set up; don't be afraid of advertising; spend your last shilling if necessary, or your last but one.' She is a cautious woman. But you take my advice and go."

"And what did she know of Mayneborough?"

"Goodness knows; I don't. But I went, and I have never had occasion to regret it, and she has done me two or three good turns since. You take my advice; I'm not joking. You call on her to-morrow; it can't do any harm, and it may be the means of turning your luck."

"Oh, I don't believe in that sort of thing. My luck is dead out, I know; but going to see a fortune-teller won't alter it, that I can see."

"Very well, have your own way, then; but don't say I didn't tell you. And now let's go to the theatre."

Nothing more was said between them, but somehow the idea of having his fortune told grew upon Mr. Parsons. He couldn't divest himself of it entirely, do what he would, and in the morning he said: "Do you know, I am half inclined to give it a trial."

"Give what a trial?"

"Why, this sorceress of yours. By the way, what's her fee—that's a consideration these times, as you know."

"Ha, ha! so you've come round, have you? Well, Madame L'Anson has a strange way of doing business. If you go to her as a stranger she charges you so much for a consultation; but if you are introduced by one of her regular clients, like myself, she is content to abide by results. No result, no pay. Fair enough, isn't it?"

"Most satisfactory to the consulting party, I should say."

"Well, here you are," writing down a name and address on a small piece of paper; "there are your credentials; I wish you luck."

As Amos Parsons entered a 'bus going in the direction stated, he had an inward feeling he was making an ass of himself. "After all, it is only a joke," he kept on repeating, "and there's nothing to pay, that's a comfort."

The 'bus put him down within ten minutes' walk of his destination, which, having been accurately described to him by his friend, he had not much difficulty in discovering. No. 133—"There's luck in odd numbers," he said to himself, with a nervous laugh—was an eminently respectable, although small villa, not at all the sort of place he had expected to find a fortune-teller at, his experience in such matters being restricted to certain "revelations" he had read in the papers from time to time. In answer to his modest knock, a trim servant appeared at the door.

"Is Madame L'Anson at home?"

She was; did the gentlemen desire to see her?

Mr. Parsons replied that he did.

The neat little sitting-room into which he was ushered had nothing remarkable about it, except that the light was to a certain extent excluded by thick curtains drawn across the window; in other respects it was of the ordinary type, such as might have been expected from the exterior of the house.

Presently the door opened, and a well-dressed woman of about thirty-five years of age made her appearance.

That she was an eminently handsome woman most people would have admitted; and the majority would probably have been unanimous in agreeing that there was a something out of the common about her. Her big black eyes seemed to search one through and through, and as she looked at Mr. Parsons he felt decidedly uncomfortable.

She lost no time in coming to the point.

"You desire to consult me, I presume."

"I—er—do, madame; my friend, Mr. Sellers, tells me he mentioned my name to you."

"He did; and what is it you desire. Love or business?"

"Did not Mr. Sellers mention that I am already married?"

"Oh; then"—as if relieved—"it's business, I suppose—business is always more satisfactory to deal with; allow me to look at your hand.

"H'm; you have had a varied experience I can see."

Mr. Parsons smiled; this was a safe remark to make, he thought.

"Things have not been going well altogether with you of late, I understood from our friend, Mr. Sellers."

"That is so, madame; and what I want to know is, if there is any chance of their improving?"

"Quite so. Cut these cards, please," handing him a well-used pack.

He obeyed her request, mechanically.

"Thank you," proceeding to deal them out, and arranging them in the form of a circle.

Mr. Parsons looked on and said nothing.

After regarding them intently for a while, the lady spoke as follows:

"I can see you won't remain long where you are."

"I can't, if things don't improve," was Mr. Parsons' remark to himself; at least he was not aware he gave vent to his thoughts, but she evidently divined them.

"That is to say, you won't be able to, if things don't mend; is that not so?" with a smile.

"The very thought I had in my mind," he answered nervously.

"Quite so; so you see I was right, but"—looking again at the cards—"I think business will improve, and that very shortly, too; now, what would you say if you were to unexpectedly—quite unexpectedly—receive payment of a sum of, say, two thousand pounds?"

"Why, that's exactly——"

"Yes, exactly enough to put you on your feet, you were going to say—give you a fresh start somewhere else perhaps; but possibly you could do this with one hundred less—say one thousand nine hundred pounds, now."

"I should be very pleased to see the one hundred just now."

The lady took no heed of the remark, but continued as if she had not heard it.

"Well, now, I am prepared to make you a bet that within, say, ten days from now, you are a richer man than you are at present by the sum I have named. Is it a bet?"

"But suppose I am not, you will have to pay me."

"Exactly, that's my lookout; but I can see from the extraordinary combination formed by the cards that, surprising as it may seem to you, it will nevertheless be as I say. Men may lie, women deceive, but cards tell the truth," and sweeping the outspread cards together she looked at him intently and again asked, "is it a bet, now?"

"But this is so very unusual, so, er—unbusinesslike," inwardly wishing he had never come into the place.

"My profession is not conducted on the same lines as an ordinary business. I have told you what I foresee; it is for you to say whether you accept my wager."

"But I can't lose."

"Pardon me, but you can——and really my time is too valuable to waste," rising as if to go from the room.

"Well, as you are so good"—with a laugh—"it would be idiotic of me to refuse; let it be a bet between us, then."

"Thanks, then I'll just put it in writing, if you don't mind," and taking out a neat little pocket-book she made an entry therein. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind signing it; your initials will do quite well. Thanks; and now if the luck I have foretold does not come off, on the tenth day from now I will remit you one hundred pounds; if it does, I shall expect you as an honourable man to do the same. *Au revoir*." And before the now bewildered Amos knew quite what had happened he found himself alone.

Once in the open air the mysterious compact ceased to trouble him so much, and he actually went so far as to laugh at what had just taken place.

Sellers was awaiting his return. "Well, what did she tell you?"

Mr. Parsons gave a graphic description of what had taken place, expecting his friend to well laugh at him for having been so easily bamboozled.

To his surprise he did nothing of the sort; but in a sententious tone, remarked: "My experience of Madame L'Anson is that she is a very clever woman; that's all I have to say."

"But my dear fellow——"

"I mean what I say, that's all; but if you are inclined to look upon the whole thing as a joke, well, so be it."

The next day the two friends returned to Mayneborough, the topic not having again been referred to.

The following morning Mr. Parsons was at his office in good time. "Any letters, Wilkins?"

"Yes, sir;" handing them to him. To his agreeable surprise three of them contained orders (from strangers), in each of which the necessary payment was inclosed.

During the next day or two business decidedly improved, the customers in every case being new ones, so that he had no hesitation in asking for prepayment.

Towards evening Mr. Sellers, as neat and spruce-looking as usual, called in casually.

"Business any better, Parsons?"

"Things are certainly looking up. That's a good sign, isn't it?" pointing to a freshly delivered bale of cotton waste standing just inside the door-way.

"I told you things would improve before long. Hallo! here's a customer," as a smart, dapper-looking little man, carrying a small black hand-bag, approached.

"I was informed at my hotel, sir, I might rely on getting a small printing order executed expeditiously at this establishment. I have run short of these price cards," handing over a square-shaped business card with a long list of prices of goods, but no name of the vendor. "I should be very much obliged if you could let me have 500 by twelve o'clock to-morrow, when I will call; and may I leave my bag here till then?" suiting the action to the word, and putting it down just by the cotton-waste.

"I'm afraid that waste is greasy, sir."

"Oh, it won't hurt, thanks; it's only an old bag; and now I'll pay you, please, if you will give me a bill. . . . Thanks. I may rely on these cards to-morrow, mid-day?"

"They shall be ready, sir."

"Smart little chap that, Parsons."

"Yes; who did he say he travelled for?"

"I didn't catch the name; isn't it on the cards?"

"No; they are only list prices."

"You charged him a pretty stiff price, didn't you?"

"Well, you see, it is short notice; in fact, my men are all gone for the night, and I was just going to lock up when you came."

"Always do that yourself?"

"Always. I never go away till I have been round the place and seen that everything is all right. One can't be too careful, I think."

"Quite right, too. Going straight home to-night?"

"Yes. I shall just catch the 6.30 train. If you've got nothing to do you might come and dine with me. I'm better company than I was now business is looking up."

* * * * *

A headline in the next morning's paper announced "Great fire in a printing establishment," and the account went on to say that the premises lately occupied by Mr. Parsons had been totally destroyed by fire.

* * * * *

Of course, there was the usual inquiry, at which it was elicited, amongst other things, that the proprietor had been the last to leave the building on the preceding evening, and his friend Mr. Sellers came forward to prove that he had accompanied him on his final tour of inspection when everything appeared to be all right.

* * * * *

The origin of the fire remained a mystery; but there being no reason to suspect incendiarism the insurance company paid up in full, after deducting the claims of several customers who had orders in course of execution, for which, as they proved by producing the receipts, they had paid for in advance.

No claim was, however, entered by the smart little man with the black bag, which was, of course, consumed by the fire, and he did not even come forward as a witness at the inquiry.

Mr. Parsons sent a one hundred-pound bill to Mrs. L'Anson, and that lady in return, by way of acknowledgment, sent him a leaf from a small pocket-book, setting forth the terms of a certain wager, to which oddly enough the initials A. P. were appended. Although the ground landlord offered to re-erect fresh premises for him, he decided that he had had enough of the place, and set up in the printing line in another town, some distance away. He has not had his fortune told since.

S. J. F. Newbery.

The Secret of the Mine.

EVERY day, at the peaceful hour of the siesta, Techina, the daughter of Señor Don Andres, used to ascend the hill and sit in the shadow of the old rock, whose jagged summit was mirrored in the blue waters of the Sangre de Dios. Juan was always awaiting her, and both used to lose themselves in dreams of future happiness. For the two loved each other, but, alas! with a hopeless love. Juan was poor; he had nothing in the world but his health and strength, and what was that to Señor Don Andres, the richest rancher in the country?

Juan and Techina, entirely absorbed in their love, never dreamt that Don Andres could refuse to unite his daughter's wealth to Juan's poverty. But one day the old ranchero informed Techina that he had promised her to Don Pablo, whose fortune was nearly equal to his own. The girl begged and prayed; but prayers and supplications were useless.

Juan remained silent while Techina was telling him her trouble, but when the girl rose to return to the rancho Juan stopped her. "Techina," said he passionately, "swear that you will love me—that you will wait for me—and I, too, will be rich!"

"I do love you, Juan," she answered. "I will never marry anyone but you; I swear it now, by the God who hears and sees us!"

One night Juan appeared before her near the rancho, his big, black eyes sparkling with pleasure.

"Come, Techina," he said, embracing her; "cheer up, and dry your tears. To-morrow we shall be happy, for to-morrow I shall be rich. I shall have so much gold that the most powerful will bow to the earth and call me 'Señor.' I will lay a queen's dowry at your feet, Techina mine, and for our wedding you shall have a dress richer and more beautiful than the Madonna's! For I have discovered the secret of the mine—that old mine where great lumps of gold have been sleeping for centuries."

"Stop, Juan, stop!" cried the girl in terror. "Do you not know that the secret of the mine is fatal?"

"Ah, the Indians say so, Techina," he answered, "but I don't believe it. The secret may kill those who wish to carry off the gold from mere love of riches, but it cannot harm him who seeks it for love of you, Techina mine."

This was the legend at Los Angeles. Long ago, the Indians said, strangers came to the country. They dug up the soil and discovered gold. They compelled the natives to extract the precious metal for them; but, as if the earth desired to preserve inviolate the riches hidden in her bosom, all who worked in the mine were struck down by a mysterious death. Then the Indians took to flight. The strangers also abandoned the district. When they had gone the natives returned, blocked up the mouth of the mine with rocks, and spread the rumour that to touch the gold was death.

Juan knew the legend, and had long shared the popular belief. But he would have dared anything for Techina's sake. He had, therefore, sought and found the entrance of the mine. Once master of the secret, he had boldly attacked the rocks, which were now bound together by the roots of great trees, whose seeds had been carried to the spot by the wind centuries before. Juan told all this to Techina, and when they parted that night she had forgotten her sadness and despair. Next morning Juan resumed his labour, which was so difficult that he often doubted whether he should ever accomplish it. But the thought of Techina nerved him, and when darkness fell he always turned homewards murmuring "To-morrow."

About this time a number of men arrived from the north. They brought strange instruments, surveyed the valley, and calculated the heights of the mountains. They also drove in stakes surmounted by little red flags. They were engineers engaged in making the Southern Pacific Railway.

Among them was one man who took no part in his companions' work. All day he used to wander about the mountain, striking the rocks with a little steel hammer, and carefully picking up the pieces which he broke off. His name was Atkins, and the inhabitants looked upon him as a madman. Several times he met Juan with his pick on his shoulder. He then followed him at a distance, and watched him at night. He came, too, in Juan's absence to satisfy himself of the progress of the work. Then Atkins' face, usually so calm and cold, was lighted up with a strange expression. He also was in search of the mine whose terrible legend he well knew.

One evening, in the little chapel, Techina was kneeling before the Madonna. She asked a blessing on Juan and on their love; and, clad in her beautiful pale blue robe, embroidered with gold and adorned with false jewels that glistened in the taper's light, the Virgin seemed to smile down upon her. Her name, pronounced quite close to her, startled her.

"Techina," a well-known voice repeated.

It was Juan who called her. She rose and followed him.

"Techina, dear Techina," he said, leading her into the shadow of the trees, "to-morrow will see my triumph and happiness. To-morrow I shall have penetrated into the mine. I have cut my way through the stones piled up by the Indians. But I wish you, Techina, to be the first to see the treasures that I have won for you; so to-morrow we will descend together. Then we will take your father with us, and let him judge whether my wealth is great enough."

"Ah! Juan," she cried, "how I love you. And how happy I am! But—I am afraid."

"But I fear nothing, Techina. The legend lied! I found the secret of the mine, and when the last stone rolled away, disclosing the entrance to the dark gallery, I did not even tremble. No, no, Techina mine, I fear nothing. You love me, and—I am rich."

Next day, when all was still in the rancho, Techina climbed the hill, and approached the base of the old rock. Juan was waiting for her, leaning on his pick beside the black hole that had been opened at the cost of so much labour. He was happier than a prince and prouder than a conqueror. Techina approached trembling, but dared not look within. She was possessed by a strange fear.

"The legend lied, Techina!" exclaimed Juan; "the secret of the mine kills no one!"

He had scarcely spoken when a sharp report sounded, a cloud of white smoke burst from a neighbouring bush, and Juan fell on his face, dead, at Techina's feet.

Another report, another cloud of smoke from the bush, and Techina had fallen on her lover's body.

Thus were they united for ever.

A man now appeared. It was Atkins.

He looked at his victims a moment; then, slipping two cartridges into his revolver, he withdrew, muttering: "The secret of the mine kills those who discover it. Now I can work it without fear."

FERNAND HUE.

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The Queen of Night.

By HEADON HILL,

Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," "The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.

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SUMMARY.

Gaston Vizard gives to Sir Simon Crawshay an introduction to the agent of the vessel *Queen of Night*, in order that he may make special arrangements with regard to the trip of his wealthy ward, Miss Challenor. Dr. Zavertal calls on Vizard, and informs him that a new captain will be wanted before the next cruise.

The *Queen of Night*, under the guise of a popular pleasure boat, is used in reality by a set of unscrupulous adventurers for the purpose of doing away with objectionable relatives.

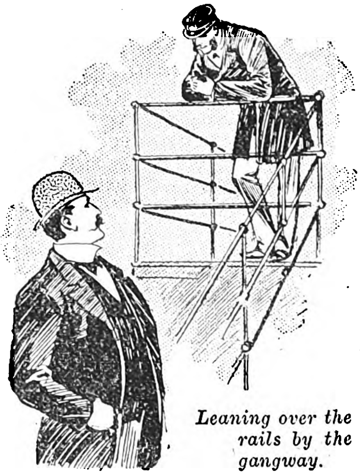
In Chapter I. Cyril Forrester receives his dismissal from the Flower Steamship Company for breaking regulations while saving the life of Miss Aline Challenor. He applies for and obtains from Nathan and Co., of Fenchurch Street, the vacant command of the ocean yacht *Queen of Night*.

Becoming engaged to Miss Challenor (who comes in for a quarter of a million on attaining her majority), he obtains an interview with Sir Simon Crawshay, who promptly refuses a consent to his engagement, and informs him that his ward will be out of his way for the next six weeks, as she is about to take a cruise on board the *Queen of Night!*

CHAPTER IV.

The Face at the Gangway.

As I stood in the Victoria Docks looking for the first time at the noble vessel I was to command I will dare wager that there was not a happier man or a prouder man than the *Queen of Night's* new captain within a thousand miles—no, not even among those homeward-bound passengers debouching from the great "liner" in the next berth.



Leaning over the rails by the gangway.

Her hull was painted a pale yellow, or cream-colour, her two funnels the same, and her brass-work glittered like burnished gold. She was bigger than any other steamer in the Docks, and from her yacht-like smartness would have been taken rather for a Navy ship than for a liner, were it not that the bright flowers and tropical plants displayed on her decks suggested war as little as commerce.

I repeat that I was a proud and happy man that morning. The ship was the cause of my pride, and need I say that my happiness sprang from the knowledge that she was to be Aline's home as well as mine for the next six weeks. Sir Simon Crawshay's announcement—made in all ignorance of my appointment to the *Queen of Night*—that my dear girl was to be one of her passengers on the coming trip had seemed almost too good to be true. But that it *was* true I gathered from his succeeding sentences, and I said nothing to disturb his ignorance.

Not knowing what was the real—the terribly real—meaning of this pleasure-cruise, I could have shouted with laughter, and had hard work to compose my face as the baronet went on to discuss the merits of the vessel I was to command. All that my silly nautical brain could grasp was, firstly, that I was besting Sir Simon, and, secondly, that Nathan's visit to Grosvenor Square was explained by business connected with the trip. I did not pause to wonder why the passage had not been booked in the ordinary way at the West-end office.

I concealed my triumph as best I could under an air of bitter chagrin, and as soon as possible took my leave, the one great hope in my heart being that Sir Simon would not discover my appointment to the *Queen of Night* before the steamer sailed. I did not know whether he was to accompany his ward, but that mattered little. If the ship could only get away without his knowing who the captain was, Aline and I would have at any rate six clear days on board together before anyone could land at Gibraltar—the first port of call. From what Nathan had let drop I gathered that the owners were not anxious to advertise the change of captains among the clients, so I thought there was every chance of gaining my object.

The testimonial of the Flower Line proved satisfactory to Nathan, and now here I was, on the day after the events recorded in the previous chapter, taking my first view of the "floating palace," as the advertisements called it, that had been committed to my charge. I had hurried down to the docks the moment the letter had been approved and the appointment ratified. The little Jew had given me a note of introduction to the surgeon of the ship—Dr. Zavertal—whom he said I should find living on board, and he further admonished me to get on as well as I could with the Doctor, as the medico of a vessel frequented largely by invalids in quest of health was necessarily an important personage.

"You will find him a nice-spoken, easy shentleman to sail with, but you had better let him have his way in anything outside the navigation of the ship," Nathan had said on handing the letter, and then he had emphasised the words by adding, significantly: "Them's *instructions*, remember."

As there still remained nearly a week before the date of departure no signs of bustle or activity were as yet apparent on the steamer, which lay alongside the wharf with her gang-plank out and only one or two men visible on deck engaged in polishing and painting. Nathan had told me that the main portion of the crew would not be shipped till two days before sailing, and that I should only find on board the officers and a few permanent hands who were retained to keep things ship-shape. Even the business of taking in the stores had not yet commenced.

Having satisfied myself with a general view of the vessel, I picked my way towards her across the lumber-strewn quay, and I was about to step on to the gang-plank when for the third time the uneasy feeling that had moved me in the office of Nathan and Co. took hold of me. Instinctively raising my eyes I saw that a man was leaning over the rails by the gangway, watching my progress with quiet interest. He wore a gold-braided cap with a peak, and from this and his dark-blue brass-buttoned frock coat I judged him to be one of the officers. That, however, was not the cause of the thrill that ran through me. Rather was it that the face was the face of the man who had turned and looked at me outside the Flower offices in Leadenhall Street, and that the eyes were the eyes which had then so vividly recalled the mysterious slits in Nathan's chart of the Black Sea.

But the strange part of this last meeting—whether it was really the second or the third I could not say—was that, as his eyes met mine and I returned look for look, the uneasy feeling left me at once and I wondered at myself for ever having entertained it. He began beaming at me with a genial smile of good-fellowship that promised the most friendly relations, and almost immediately sang out:

"Step aboard, sir. Welcome to the *Queen of Night*."

Quickly crossing the plank, I found him waiting at the other end to receive me, when he added:

"A passenger to view the ship?"

I was dressed in plain clothes, so that the question was a perfectly natural one, provided that I had been mistaken about the eyes in the map, and that his presence outside the Flower offices had been accidental. There was certainly nothing in his demeanour to show that he had ever seen me before, or that he was not thoroughly aboveboard.

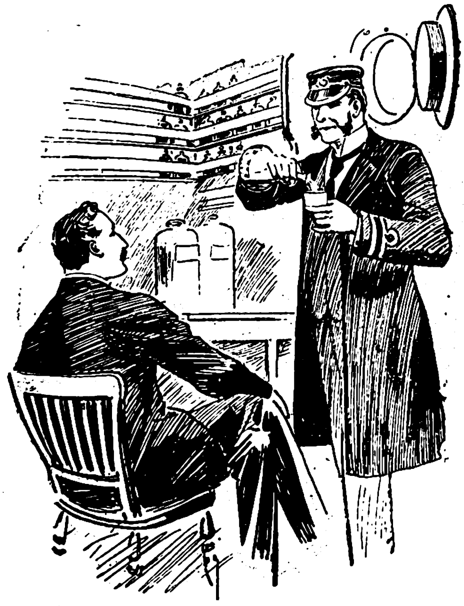
"No," I said. "My name is Forrester—Captain Forrester. I have been appointed to command the ship. I have a letter here for Dr. Zavertal."

"My dear Captain, I am delighted to be the first to receive you," he said, shaking me warmly by the hand. "I am Dr. Zavertal. Come into my den and refresh yourself, or perhaps you would prefer to make your tour of inspection first."

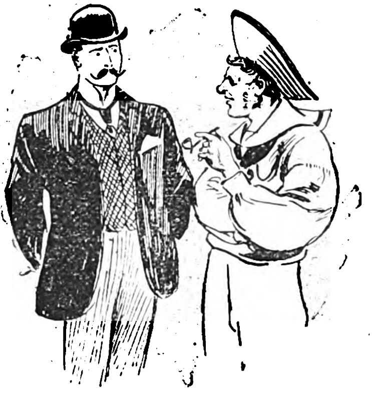
I told him that I should be very glad to begin with a chat, and he led the way to his deck-cabin amidships, glancing at Nathan's open letter of introduction on the way. The combination of surgery and study into which he showed me was, like every other portion of the steamer, luxuriously furnished and softly upholstered. The walls were matchboarded with some costly polished wood, and the floor was thickly carpeted. On the two seaward sides were plate-glass windows instead of the usual circular lights. At the fore end were fixed the shelves for drugs and medical appliances, while right across the after part of the cabin hung a gorgeous curtain shutting off the Doctor's sleeping apartment. A canary and a couple of gaudy parroquets twittered in gilded cages, and there were bright flowers everywhere.

"Snug quarters, Doctor," I said, coming to an anchor on a chair, while he busied himself with glasses and decanters.

"Yes, it's not a bad crib for a struggling medico, is it?" he assented jovially. "You see my department is the health, happiness, and comfort of the passengers. I couldn't keep them healthy, happy, and comfortable if I wasn't all that myself—so I do myself well."



Busied himself with glasses and decanters.



"It ain't always the sickest as snuffs it the quickest!"

"I can understand that you have your hands full," I replied. "The doctor on a regular liner hasn't too soft a time of it—on a ship full of health-seekers you must almost need an assistant."

A wink seemed now quite natural to those smiling eyes which had struck me with such a queer chill at first, and Doctor Zavertal winked as he said: "Oh, don't run away with that idea, Captain. They're not so sick as all that. Only about ten per cent. each voyage are what you might call invalids, and of them not more than half are bad cases. This is a very gay ship, I can tell you. Nathan will have said as much?"

"Yes, he seemed to set as much store on social qualities in his skipper as in seamanship," I replied.

"Well, hardly that; it is a combination of the two that is indispensable in our line of business," said Zavertal. "Old Nathan is a sharp man. If you'll allow me to say so, Captain Forrester, I think he's got the article he wants. At any rate, you look the part."

It crossed my mind that to "look the part" was about all that would be required of me in the character of a Master of the Ceremonies, if what the little Jew had told me was correct—that Zavertal himself bore the brunt of the entertaining. That would suit me very well, for I was never a lady's man, and should much social philandering be expected of me my appointment would not be likely to be a durable one.

"Well, Doctor," I said, "after all I'm here to sail the ship, and that must be my first care. I have no doubt that with you to *do* the social part I shall be able to *look* it all right."

He waved his hand deprecatingly, as though pleased that I had no intention of usurping functions which he had been in the habit of performing, and then for the fraction of a second his eyes hardened, and there came into them that peculiar glint which had startled me as he stood on the kerb in the city street. It was as if he shot one keen glance to probe my honesty of purpose and was satisfied, for the look passed and the eyes smiled again. Let me say here that though I was this man's nominal chief, and he treated me with proper deference, yet I felt from the first that his was the influence which with the owners and passengers, if we ever came to a conflict, would prevail.

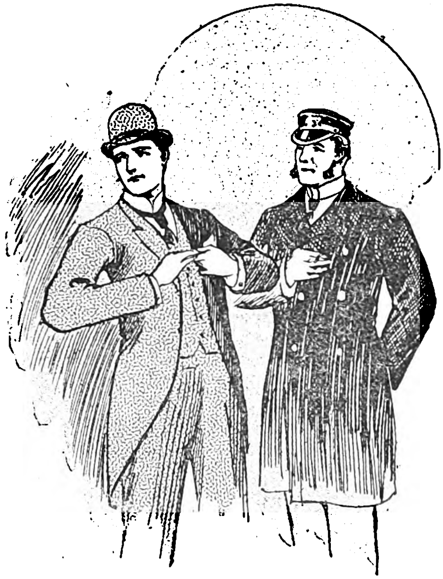
We smoked and chatted for half-an-hour, and then I asked him to show me over the ship and introduce me to the other officers. To the first proposition he agreed with alacrity, the second was out of his power, as the three mates were living on shore during the steamer's stay in port. The chief officer was expected next day, but at present the ship was in charge of the bo'sun. I made the acquaintance of this honest sailor-man, and was conducted by him from stem to stern, the result of the inspection being that never had I seen a better found and equipped vessel, with more generous owners, honestly desirous of promoting the comfort of the passengers and crew. Doctor Zavertal accompanied me through the after part of the ship, but after a while he left me with the bo'sun, who took advantage of his absence to fire off a volley of eloquence on the benefit of serving such a firm as Nathan and Co. in such a craft as the *Queen of Night*.

"Jest a sea-goin' hotel, she is," was the bo'sun's verdict. "Plenty of vittles, lib'ral grog, and every one to enjoy theirselves—'fore the mast and in the cabin. It may be kindness of 'art, or it may be the way the owners takes to make 'em forget the funerals. I don't say but what it ain't a bit of both, but it makes a live ship, anyway."

"To forget the funerals! What on earth do you mean, my man?" I exclaimed.

"Well, you see, sir," said the bo'sun, hitching up his trousers, "there be some as come aboard the *Queen* in search of 'elth as finds the other thing. Bound to be above the average of sea burials on a craft as is in a manner of speaking a 'elth resort as well as a big yacht. You may have observed, sir, that 'elth resorts is mostly the parrydise of the on'elthy."

My bo'sun was evidently a philosopher, and, gruesome as was the idea, I could well understand that it might not be altogether groundless. There is nothing more depressing than a funeral at sea, and the owners would be quite likely to do their best to counteract this influence by infusing as much gaiety as possible into the life of the ship. "But surely," I asked, "the passengers were not in the habit of dying wholesale? You cannot mean to suggest that that happens."



A tall, finely-built fellow.

"Lor' bless you, no, Captain," was the reassuring reply. "Sometimes one, sometimes two, but never more than three or four a voyage. That's not bad out of three or four hundred, and it ain't always the sickest as snuffs it the quickest, neither."

We made our way aft again along the main deck, taking the engine-room, with its slumbering "triple-expansion," "twin-screw" giants, *en route*. In passing along I could not fail to be struck with the beautiful fittings of the staterooms, with the electric light and electric bells everywhere; while the cooks' quarters, with their shining copper utensils and cool marble slabs, the great ice-chambers, and the bandroom, now empty save for rows of uniform coats and the bright brass instruments, claimed my admiration in turn. As for the grand saloon, music-room, and smoking-room, though I had sailed in many crack liners, I had never seen anything to equal the lavish splendour of the decorations in white and gold, the costly pictures, and tasteful harmony of colouring that prevailed.

Mounting to the upper deck, Simmons, the bo'sun, showed me my own cabin, which was situated under the main bridge, next the chart-room. It was a large, comfortably-furnished apartment, having a bedstead instead of a bunk in a curtained alcove, and good enough for a lady's boudoir. I had never been berthed like that before, and as I looked at the cushioned couches and easy chairs, I remember feeling positively afraid lest I should grow "soft" amid so much luxury.

Outside my cabin I dismissed Simmons from further attendance, and went towards the surgery to take leave of Doctor Zavertal before quitting the ship. Approaching his cabin from forward I had to step on several new coils of rope that had not yet been stowed, and these so deadened my footfall that I reached the door without giving any warning sound. Owing to this cause I overheard a few words of conversation which I now know were not intended for my ears.

"If this cursed American really means to go the trip, I should indeed be glad to have you with me," Doctor Zavertal was saying. "But how about your schemes for the subsequent voyage?"

"They would have to go by the board for this once," came the reply in a well-modulated gentlemanly voice. "We have done so well that we can afford to lose our special profits on one trip—what we can't afford to do is to take risks."

At this point I stepped into the cabin, and found the Doctor with a tall, finely-built fellow who had apparently not long arrived, for he stood just inside the cabin, and was in the act of removing his gloves. Neither he nor the Doctor showed any apprehension of having been overheard, but the latter said quickly:

"Ah, so you have completed your round of the ship, Captain? This gentleman, Mr.—thank you, I did not quite catch the name—Mr. Vizard, is a possible passenger, and has come to have a look at our accommodation."

"I hope he will be as pleased with it as I have been," I replied, bowing to the stranger.

"This is Captain Forrester, who has just been appointed to the command," explained Zavertal.

Mr. Vizard had been regarding me with a rather critical stare, but on the introduction being made mutual he smiled politely and remarked that he hoped to have a pleasant voyage in the *Queen of Night* under my auspices. I made the proper sort of reply, and, having arranged to take up my abode on the steamer on the following day, I bade them both good-day and went ashore.

"But why," I asked myself, as I passed through the dock gates, "did Zavertal hesitate in giving Vizard's name as though to convey the impression that it was unknown to him?"

The answer was beyond me, for I was ready to swear that they were not strangers to each other. *Vizard was the man who had been with Zavertal in Leadenhall Street on the previous day.* And who was "the cursed American," and what did "risks" and "special profits" mean?

CHAPTER V.

The Missing Passengers.

The day appointed for the departure of the *Queen of Night* broke fair and sunny, and the hour of noon found us all in trim to receive the passengers. A crew fit for a man-of-war had been shipped. The stewards' department was in full working order under its permanent chief, and the store rooms were crammed with all the delicacies in and out of season. There was little of the bustle customary on the sailing of a big steamer—first, because we carried no cargo, and, secondly, because there was no heavy baggage to be shipped. A cabin trunk or two generally sufficed each passenger for the six weeks' cruise, and these they brought with them.

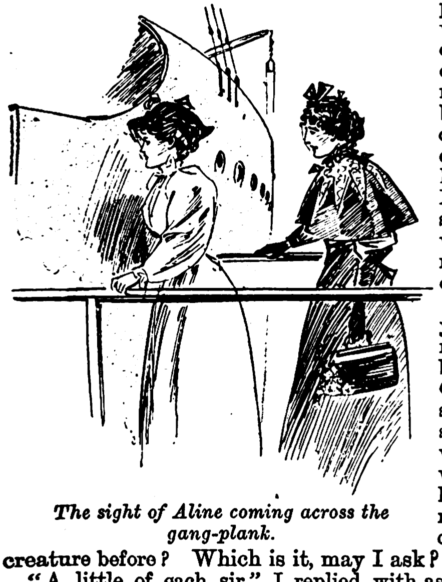
We were not due to warp out of dock till three, but the first comers began to arrive in time for the luncheon that had been announced as ready for passengers and their friends at one o'clock in the grand saloon. As captain of the ship it was beneath my dignity to receive our guests in person as they came on board, but Dr. Zavertal was literally a "host in himself," welcoming, assisting, and directing everyone—a duty in which he was ably assisted by the purser and stewards. This arrangement suited me admirably. I had ascertained from the passenger-list that

Sir Simon Crawshay had not booked a passage for himself, Aline having for a travelling companion a certain Mrs. Brinkworth, of whom I had never heard. But there was the chance that the baronet would accompany his ward to the steamer for the purpose of seeing her off, and my great fear was lest he should take her ashore again and forfeit her passage on finding that I was in command of the ship.

To obviate any such discovery, I kept my own room while the passengers were arriving, and it was fortunate that circumstances favoured my doing so without attracting attention. Apart from the fact that the Doctor was making himself so useful, I had a reasonable excuse for remaining out of sight in the necessity of sticking to my desk for the signing of reports and orders, as well as of holding an interview with Nathan to receive final instructions. There would be nothing to call me to the bridge till the bell rang "all clear."

The windows of the captain's room gave a clear view of the quay-side and of the gangway, and you may be sure that never on dark and dirty nights did I keep a sharper look out than I did for my girl's sweet face that day. Like most good things she was "lang o' comin'." Troops of smart people thronged gaily over the plank to the gangway where our courteous purser stood to check the passenger-list, the popping of champagne corks from the saloon told us that the farewell lunch had begun, but as yet there were no signs of Aline. Presently Nathan's shambling footsteps were heard outside, and he entered my cabin to furnish me with a list of places where I was to coal, and of the firms I was to deal with; and I had hard work to give him my attention and to watch the gangway at the same time.

He was sitting by my side at the cabin table with his papers before him, emphasising his instructions with the tip of a strong cigar which served the double purpose of a pointer. His ferrety eyes shifted from the paper to my face and back again perpetually, noting whether or no I understood his points. It was while he was searching for some particulars relating to his agent at Malta that my heart bounded at the sight of Aline coming across the gang-plank followed by a good-looking, ladylike woman of about thirty. I had barely time to notice that my girl looked pale and sad, and to indulge the glad hope that, rather than to illness, it was due to a cause which would soon be dissipated, when a wheezing chuckle at my elbow recalled me to the desirability of concealing my emotions. I was half afraid that I had not done so, for Nathan was regarding me with a sardonic leer.

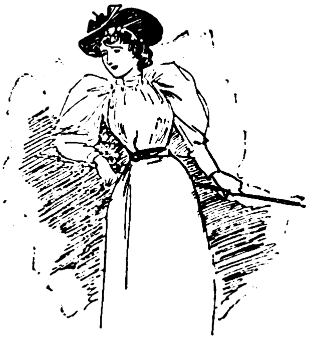

The sight of Aline coming across the gang-plank.

"I see that you are an admirer of female beauty, my gay Captain," he said, glancing significantly towards the gangway, "or perhaps you have met that charming young creature before? Which is it, may I ask?"

"A little of each, sir," I replied, with assumed indifference. "I know a pretty face when I see one, and I think I have some slight acquaintance with the young lady who has just come aboard. That is," I added, "if I am right in recognising her as a Miss Challenor, the ward of Sir Simon Crawshay."

Nathan shrugged his shoulders with an air of unconcern, but he still kept his eyes on mine as he answered: "Mosh likely that is her. A shentleman named Sir Simon Crawshay has booked passages for two ladies, I know. Ah, well, Captain," he continued, relaxing his gaze at last, "you had better make hay while the sun shines. Sir Simon will not be on board to shpoil shport."

He evinced no curiosity as to where and when I had met Miss Challenor, and we resumed our business. Now that I was assured of Sir Simon's absence, I was able to give my owner an undivided attention, with the result that the remaining matters were quickly disposed of, and Nathan left the cabin. He had scarcely gone when the chief officer, Mr. McIntyre, came to tell me that the pilot was aboard. I gave orders for the first bell to be rung to begin to clear the ship of passengers' friends, and then went up on to the bridge to direct the preparations for warping out. After a few words with the pilot and the mates I turned to scan the deck below for Aline. I was rewarded at once. She was standing with her back to the railing on the side farthest from the quay, quite alone, and watching, with what I thought was a wistful interest, the first departures for the shore.


She was standing with her back to the railing.

Telling the chief officer that I had caught sight of some friends, and that I would be back directly, I hurried from the bridge and went aft to where Aline stood. Never shall I forget the look of glad wonder with which she started to me as I softly spoke her name, and she realised by the smart uniform I was wearing that I was probably, as she *naïvely* put it, "going too." Let me be excused from recording the few words in which I confirmed that happy surmise, and those with which she received the news. Most of the people were still down in the saloon, doing justice to the farewell luncheon, and those on deck were busy with their own affairs, so that our meeting was more private than might have been expected in such a place.

"And now, dearest, what is this that Sir Simon tells me of your illness?" I asked, when I had briefly explained my position on the *Queen of Night*. "I thought you were looking a little sad just now, but you do not by any means justify the poor account he gave of you."

"There is absolutely nothing the matter with me, Cyril," she replied. "If I looked sad the cause of it is all gone *now*. I was regretting having to leave England without seeing you, but the last few minutes have changed the prospect of the voyage into a dream of delight."

"But your guardian must have had some grounds for making such a statement, surely?" I persisted, though my anxiety was nearly quelled by the obvious truth of her own account of herself. Now that the sadness had left her face, she was again the picture of radiant health.

"Oh, I expect the wish was father to the thought," she said lightly. "Sir Simon kept harping on my pallor and want of appetite—two utter fictions—so long that I almost began to believe in them myself. Do you know what I think his real motive was in sending me on this trip?"

"No; tell me," I said.

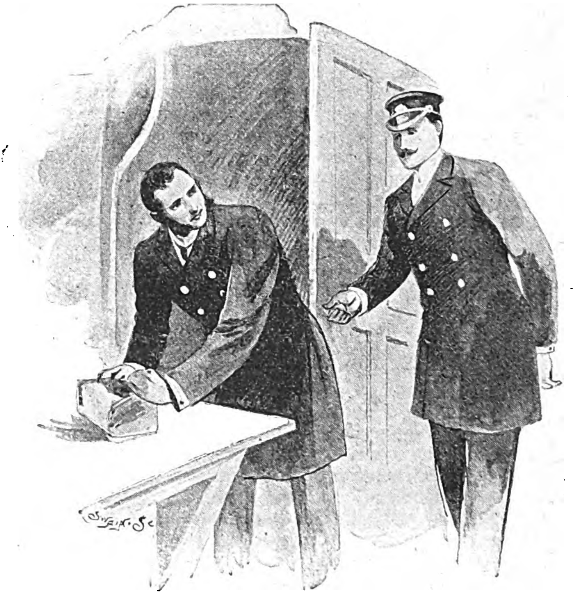
"I believe he suspected that there was something between us, and that he wanted to get me out of the way before your return," Aline said. "The steamer would have sailed a week ago, I am told, if they had found a new captain sooner. To think that it should be you."

"Well, if that was his game, Sir Simon has been fairly sold," I laughed. "And now dearest I must run away. The skipper of a boat of this size has plenty to do on leaving port, and I may not see much of you for the next twenty-four hours. One question, though. Who is your companion?"

"She is a Mrs. Brinkworth—Ella her Christian name is, and I call her by it already," was the reply. "My guardian engaged her specially to chaperon me on this trip—through an advertisement, I believe. I have only known her three days, but I like her much. She has been unhappy in her married life—poor thing."

"Do you trust her well enough to tell her of our engagement?" I asked, with a keen appreciation of the value of a friendly chaperon during the voyage.

"I have not told her yet, but I shall soon see," Aline said, as nodding gaily she dismissed me to my duties.



Engaged in unpacking a parcel of drugs.

It was time to finally clear the ship of strangers, and as soon as I reached the bridge I gave orders for the last warning bell to be rung. The lingerers at the saloon table came streaming up on deck, and the crowd quickly thinned as the friends and relatives of our passengers went streaming on to the quay. It was a festive scene, resembling more the close of some social function than the departure of a great steamer. The sadness of farewell, so noticeable when a regular liner starts for a distant port, was entirely absent in the case of a six weeks' pleasure cruise.

At last the chief officer reported "All clear," and I was about to order "In gang-plank," when the purser came running up the bridge ladder and announced that two passengers who had booked had not arrived. One was a Mr. Franklin Kennard, of the United States, and the other Mr. Gaston Vizard, of Park Lane. Would I wait for them?

In the rush and bustle of the past week I had almost forgotten the American who had appeared while I was waiting in Nathan's office, and who had had the curious *rencontre* on the stairs with some unknown individual as he left. Vizard, of course, I remembered as the man whom I had seen on two occasions—once in Leadenhall Street, and again when I first came to see the ship. I was too busy to be struck with the coincidence that the only two intending passengers, besides Aline, of whom I had any previous knowledge, and both, so far as I knew, entirely unconnected with each other, should have failed to embark. All my mind was concentrated on getting the ship away as quickly as possible, and knowing that Zavertal was practically in charge of the passengers, and would be aware whether any special circumstances called on me to wait for the two truants, I ran down to consult him.

In the last few days, while living on board, I had got very chummy with the Doctor, and deciding to draw the "home cover" first, though hardly expecting to find him there, I did not hesitate in my haste to open the door of his cabin without knocking. Judge, then, of my surprise when crossing the threshold I not only heard Zavertal's voice, but, as I thought, that of the Mr. Vizard who I had just been informed was not on the ship. Opening the door smartly, I was still more astonished to see the Doctor, quite alone, engaged in unpacking a parcel of drugs.

"I thought I heard Mr. Vizard's voice," I said, looking round blankly.

"Did you, Captain?" said Zavertal, looking up with his usual friendly smile. "I expect he is somewhere around on deck, then."

"No," I answered; "I didn't see any one outside. I came to say that the purser reports him as not on board. Also another passenger who booked—a Mr. Kennard—has not turned up. What is the custom in such cases? Shall we give them a little law?"

"Well," said the Doctor in the confidentially respectful tone of a subordinate who desires to be really helpful, "that is for you to decide, sir; but if I may advise you in my private capacity I should say *not*. The owners won't be inclined to blame you for a couple of forfeited passages, seeing that there will be two mouths less to fill. It has happened before, and the last captain never waited?"

"That settles it, then," I exclaimed, and returning to the bridge I gave the word to close the gangway and warp out of dock. So sure was I of having heard Vizard's voice that I suspected the Doctor of a practical joke, and I was strengthened in the idea by having noticed a tremulous motion in the curtain that screened the bedplace from the surgery. I fully expected that Vizard, if not Kennard as well, would put in an appearance the first time the gong sounded for a meal.

But it was not so. Owing to the difficult navigation at the mouth of the river I had to stick to the bridge that night, and was unable to join the company at dinner in the saloon. After the meal was over, however, I sent for the purser and inquired if anything had been seen of either Mr. Kennard or Mr. Vizard.

"No, sir," was the reply; "they are certainly not on the ship. Their cabins are unoccupied, and they were not at dinner. I have ticked them off as 'forfeits.'"

(To be continued.)

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 353. FOR WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 5TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

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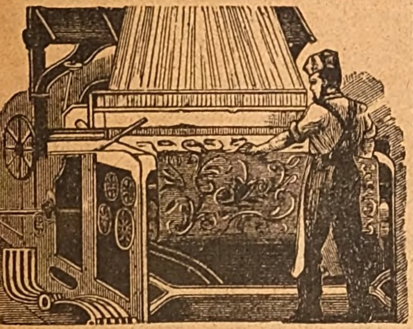

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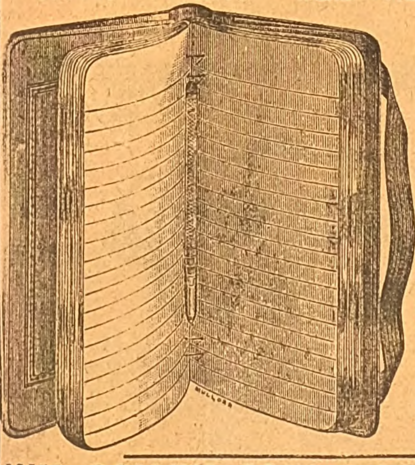

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EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY

SHORT STORIES

No. 353.] For the Week ending October 5th, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

Their First Dinner Party.

THEY had only been married a month, and they had asked two friends to dinner. It was only an informal invitation, and her note wound up with: "If you are able to come don't trouble to reply." It was the first time they had had guests; consequently they were a little flurried when the time came for them to arrive.

She had superintended the arranging of the table herself, and now stood surveying its obviously new silver, glass, and linen, with housewifely pride.

"Do you really think everything will go well, Edward?" she asked for the twentieth time.

And for the twentieth time he replied:

"Of course it will all go well. I only pity the poor fellows who have no little wife and no home of their own."

"Oh, Edward, how nice!" she whispered; "and how I do pity the poor girls who have no nice, kind husbands. There is Edith. She is such a sweet girl, she really ought to know how nice it is to be married."

"Yes, indeed; and then there is George. He has no idea what happiness he is missing."

She walked into the drawing-room, and, standing before the mirror, rearranged the rose in her hair.

"Do you like it so?" she asked.

"It is lovely. Poor George, how he must envy me!"

"And, oh, Edward, I do feel sorry for Edith. Hark, is that a carriage?"

They both fell into easy attitudes of expectancy, but the carriage rolled on. He took out his watch and looked at it; it was just seven.

"Oh, dear," she moaned, "I'm afraid they will not be prompt, and my note said seven sharp."

"Perhaps my watch is fast," he said soothingly.

She shifted the rosebud a little, then replaced it, regarding herself in the glass with a critical air. He walked up and down with his hands in his pockets.

* * * * * *

The clock chimed the half-hour.

"You are sure you said seven sharp?"

"Of course I am. I am not quite an imbecile yet, if I married you."

"Who is talking unkindly now?"

"Oh, I never thought that you would treat me so when you begged me to marry you."

"I only asked you once, and you said yes quick enough."

"I never thought you would be a brute."

"And I never thought you would lose your temper like this."

"Nobody will accept my invitations now, just because I have married you—mamma said I was making a mistake."

"People were always glad enough to accept my invitations before I was married."

"Very well, if you want to be free I will go home."

"If you want to go, pray don't allow me to detain you."

* * * * *

The clock chimed out eight strokes; carriages kept rolling by, but none of them stopped. She swept into the bedroom, and began opening drawers and boxes and taking out their contents, which she could not see for her tears. He tried to hum "After the Ball," watching her movements furtively through the open door. Would she leave him? And what would people say if she did?

She tumbled the costly things about in a careless fashion. What did their beauty matter now when she was going home with a broken heart to die!

Then she gave a cry. Her eye had fallen on a white slip of paper in the corner of a drawer.

"Edward!" she cried, in tragic tones, "here is the note—I had forgotten to send it!"

They looked at each other for a moment—these two who were about to part for ever—then a smile curled the corners of her mouth. In an instant she was clasped in his arms. Then a harsh voice sounded at the door:

"Would yez be havin' any dinner to-noight?"

"Oh, Edward," she whispered, "how shall I ever tell the cook?"

W. H.

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Love - and - Life.

A TWOFOLD SACRIFICE.

It was the very saddest summer that I ever spent. I do not think I shall ever forget the pathos—the tragedy of it. After a few weeks' tramping tour through the south-west of England I found myself again in London, somewhat freckled and tanned, and my senses full of the perfume of mignonette and wild-rose hedges. I did not intend to stay long—only long enough to glance at accumulations of letters, and send a few telegrams, and then be off again to the streams and the meadows and the quaint old roadside inns, with their apple-cheeked barmaids and excellent provender. But where to go? That was the question.

Ah? here was a letter on the very top of the little heap that my landlady had piled on my mantelpiece, and that decided me at once. It was from Archie Trevor, as bright and handsome a boy as ever toed football-leather, and who had distinguished himself scholastically as well as athletically at Cambridge. "I won't take any refusal," he wrote; "you simply have to come, old chap. This is the loveliest spot in the world, and, besides, I'm engaged, and I want you to see the loveliest creature that ever drew breath. I'll expect you any time within ten days. If you don't show up in that time I'll come after you."

As the friend of Archie's father, though many years his junior, I had been thrown much in contact with the boy, and since the old gentleman's death we had been warm friends. Archie in love, eh? Well, I felt sure it would be a serious matter with him. He was earnest and intense by nature, and had never played the butterfly with the women of his acquaintance.

Archie's letter was, I perceived, a week old, but in just three days I found myself in the quaint little Welsh seaport town from which he had written. I climbed the hill and inquired my way to Rose Cottage, and when I came to it and to Mr. Archie it was all I could do to prevent myself bellowing with delight at the infinite beauty of the scene.

The long white walls of the cottage were massed with roses from top to bottom. Roses clustered over the thatched roof, roses nodded their heads from the mullioned windows, and brushed your coat-sleeve as you walked along the narrow path. At the back of the cottage was a comfortable lawn and more roses—ever roses—countless roses. And, stretching away in the distance, shimmering in the sunlight, was the sea.

Archie leapt from a hammock and grabbed me by the hand. "How glad I am to see you, dear old Jack!" he exclaimed, his delicate cheeks flushing with pleasure. I returned his greeting in kind, and then for the first time became conscious of the girl standing shyly by us.

She had risen from a low chair on the farther side of the hammock, and had a book in her hand, from which she had evidently been reading to my constitutionally lazy friend. Her beauty simply stunned me. She was very tall, quite two inches taller than Archie, with one of those almost faultless figures that, in girlhood at least, one finds in England, and nowhere else.

She had light-brown hair, on which the sun scattered little gold flecks, and her eyes were of the deepest, tenderest blue, and big and earnest and wistful. Lastly, she was dressed all in white—the only hue for a sweet girl's dress in summer—and it is scarcely necessary to say that I surrendered to Master Archie's *fiancée* at discretion, mentally voting him the luckiest dog under heaven, no matter who she might be.

That night, as we sat smoking our farewell pipes, and with that glorious odour of roses stealing in through the open windows, Archie told me his story. It was romantic enough. He had been riding past, three weeks ago, on his bicycle, and had had a bad fall at the very moment he had been slackening speed to admire the beauty of the garden of roses. Dorothy (for that was her name) had seen his ungraceful performance, and his ineffectual effort to rise. At her commands an ancient gardener had wheeled him into the house, in ridiculous fashion enough, and the village doctor had attended to his dislocated knee. Dorothy's aunt had, during the next three weeks, fallen almost as deeply in love with the handsome young sufferer as had her niece. Yes, indeed, I congratulated Archie over and over again.

Dorothy and I became firm friends at once. Perhaps it was because I knew myself to be too old and worldly-wise to get into any sort of danger that led me to associate with this pair of lovers so freely. The three of us took long rambles together through the meadows and down by the restless and ever-changing sea. It did me good on such occasions to note Archie's almost childish delight in his *fiancée*. After all, he was nothing but a boy, despite his twenty-seven years. He laughed the whole day long, and made love to Dorothy as one makes love to a beautiful, spoiled child.

And she? Why, she accepted it all in a silent, satisfied sort of way. She accepted the boy's kisses soberly, without any show of emotion, and as a matter of course. I sometimes thought I would give £100 to see her tremble or blush. It was easy to see that this was her first love. She was so matter-of-fact about it all, and it was so easy to see there was not a vestige of passion in it for her. I could see, too, that she was proud of her handsome boy-lover in a certain way. As she sat on the sand, looking so very lovely in her white dress, with that far-away look on the dewy blue eyes, she would stroke with her slim hands the blonde head that lay so luxuriously on her lap and smile shyly up a me for congratulation and approval.

And then came the first chapter in the tragedy.

The three of us had been for a long ramble along the beach, and Archie had his pockets filled with the shells and other treasures gathered by his sweetheart. We were on our way back, for rain had begun to fall heavily and a few rumblings of thunder warned us of the typical Welsh storm that was in store for us. We were making a short cut up a winding path through the cliffs, when the storm broke in all its fury.

I don't think I have ever seen such lightning, or heard such thunder, not even in the tropics. I was leading the way, and between the awful peals I could hear

Archie encouraging the beautiful girl he was half carrying, half dragging along.

There suddenly came a peal loud enough to wake the dead, and as it died away I uttered a yell of warning and sprang aside. A huge piece of rock, fully four feet high, loosened by the shock, was sliding down the path. As it passed me I glanced back, and turned sick with horror, for the pair were just at a point where they could not hope to escape it. They could not turn to the right or left, and immediately behind them was another rock, immovably fixed, and against which the down-coming fragment would grind them, as it seemed, to pieces.

It all happened in an instant. I was powerless to help. At the instant, apparently, that the rock was sliding upon them, I saw Archie seize Dorothy in his arms, below the waist, and lift her up. Higher and higher he raised her, till she rested on his shoulder. Then there was a horrible crunching sound that I shall never forget.

* * * * *

It took two strong men with crowbars to release my friend. By good fortune the rock that had fallen was conically-shaped, the smaller end uppermost, else he would have inevitably been crushed. As it was, both his legs were shattered from the knee down.

No sufferer was ever nursed as Archie was. Dorothy, whose grief was pitiable, would never have left his side if I had not forced her to do so.

I had, of course, written to the Trevor family of the accident, and then, one divinely-beautiful August night, Lieutenant Guy Trevor, Archie's elder brother, came to Rose Cottage to see him. His ship was at Portsmouth, and the moment he heard of the boy's mishap, he hurried to him. And the great big sailor—he was over six feet, and looked like some giant of the Orient, with his splendid proportions, and tanned features—knelt by his young brother's bed, and spoke to him with sobs in his deep bass voice.

Through the window I saw the meeting between the sailor and Dorothy, and I have often wondered since then why I did not scent the peril at the time.

Both stood for an instant perfectly still, transfixed by each other's wonderful physical beauty; then Guy introduced himself, and the two walked slowly away, talking in whispers of the calamity that had befallen the boy they both loved so dearly.

Twice during that week I saw the tears stealing down the pale cheeks of the cripple, as he lay there, so still, on his narrow white bed. Once he spoke to me of Dorothy. "You must tell her, old man," he whispered, "that I release her unconditionally."

"She will not hear of it," I answered.

And then the day arrived for the coming of the London surgeon. He brought two assistants with him. Guy, Dorothy, and I were present at their interview with the lad.

"Let me understand," said Archie, in weak tones, but bravely; "if I do not choose to submit to this—this operation, it is certain death, isn't it?"

The great man bowed his head.

"What shall I do, Dorothy?" The tones were very tremulous now.

"Oh, Archie!" she sobbed, sinking on her knees by the bed, "submit to it for my sake. It will make no difference. I will care for you as long as I live."

I happened to glance at the giant, Guy, and saw that his bronzed face had turned almost white.

"Well," sighed the patient, softly stroking the bright head of the kneeling girl, "it shall be as you say. Shall we begin, doctor?"

"Not to-night, my boy," answered the surgeon, rather huskily—the man evidently possessed some feeling—"you will need all your strength. To-morrow morning, early——"

He did not finish the sentence, and all but I withdrew, Dorothy weeping silently. I sat and watched my young friend sink into a restless sleep.

I must have dozed myself, for I presently found the moon shining softly through the open window, and with the silvery beams that lighted up the wan face on the pillow in a ghastly way came the eternal scent of roses.

As I leant forward to make sure my patient was asleep, I heard voices from the verandah just beyond the window of the room, which was on the ground floor of the cottage. Presently I heard Guy speaking. There was no mistaking those deep bass tones.

"I do not think," he was saying, "that it is so very vile in me. No man could help loving you, and Heaven knows I would not seek to betray that poor boy in there by so much as a thought. Nor would I wish you to do so. To-morrow I will go away, for I cannot bear it. But before I go you must tell me—there is no harm in that, I think—you love me, do you not?"

I could not hear the response; only a low, passionate sobbing. That placid nature was aroused at last.

"I knew it, dear," went on the deep voice, "I knew it that first night that you looked into my eyes. And it is because I know that you love me that I should wish you to be as you are—strong and faithful and true. I love my brother and—I am an honest man. But when I go I shall leave all my life here with you. Dorothy, dear, good night and—good-bye."

Silence. I could feel the magnetism of the inevitable kiss, just as if I had seen it. I heard a faint rustle of draperies and the tread of vanishing feet. Then I looked at Archie, and my heart stood still.

His eyes were closed, but tears were trickling through the long lashes, and the sensitive mouth quivered. He had heard every word, I had no doubt, and was now trying to feign sleep, obviously for my benefit.

There was a choking in my heart as I rose and left the room. I could not bear it. I looked in once or twice during the night, to find the same thing—tear-stained cheeks and a sham sleep.

When we entered the room in the morning he smiled cheerfully, and extended his hand to the surgeon. "Doctor," he said, briskly, "I've changed my mind. You shan't saw my shins off. I'll take chances. I've that right, haven't I?"

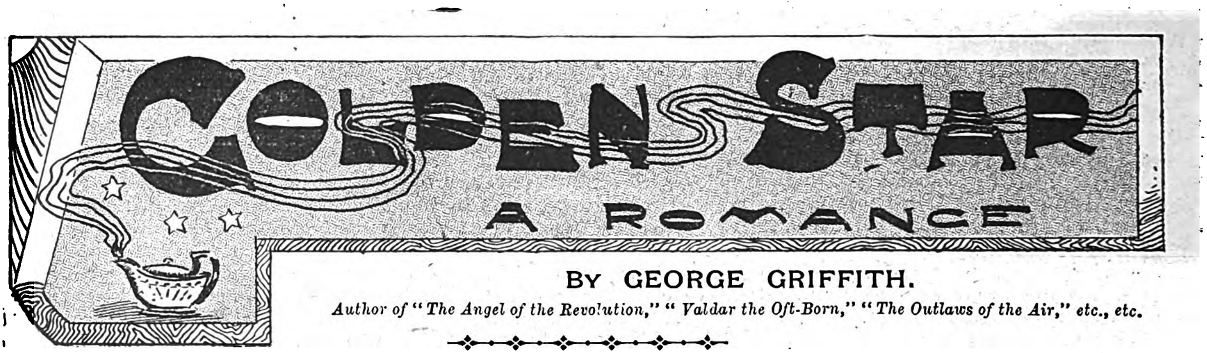
"Certainly, Mr. Trevor," answered the man gravely, "but I warn you that it will be fatal."

Nothing that we could say could shake his determination. His brother Guy, whose great figure seemed to fill the room, joined his pleadings to Dorothy's, but to no avail. When the doctor and his men had gone, he breathed a sigh of relief, and went fast asleep with his hand in Dorothy's.

He died very suddenly ten days afterwards. There was a glorious sunset of crimson and gold, and still that eternal scent of the roses. He rose suddenly from his pillow and looked out over the sea and then sank gently back. Dorothy was by his side in an instant, but he only touched her cheek lightly with his lips and then beckoned to his brother. "Guy—dear old Guy!" he murmured, pulling the great shaggy head down upon his emaciated breast—"kiss me, old chap, and take care of *her*." That was the end.

And neither of them ever knew.

Mary Bryan.



GOLDEN STAR

A ROMANCE

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

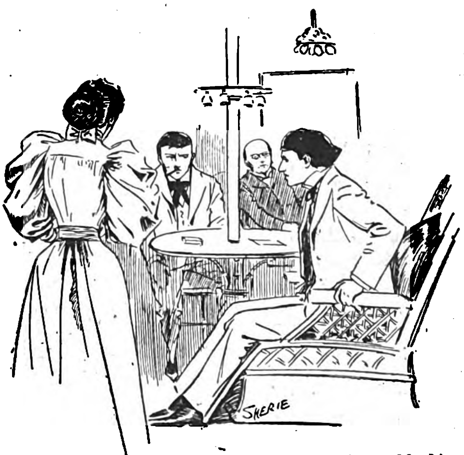
SUMMARY.

The prologue tells of the bridal of Vilcaroya and Golden Star, on the eve of the fall of the Inca empire. It has been prophesied that when the sceptre of the Incas shall be grasped by the hand of one who has been dead, and is alive again, the ancient glories of their empire shall be restored. Golden Star, one of the Virgins of the Sun, offers herself as the bride of him who will fulfil the prophecy. Vilcaroya swears for love of her to dare the ordeal. Three hundred years later Professor Martin Lamson brings back to England a mummy which he found in a cave in the Cordilleras of the Peruvian Andes. A doctor, Laurens Djama, is present while he is unpacking it, and undertakes to restore it to animation. The mummy is removed to Djama's laboratory, and in a week he shows the Professor his mummy alive. The Professor learns that he is the Vilcaroya of the legend. He asks for Golden Star, and they tell him that she has been dead for over three hundred years. He promises them that if they will restore her, too, to life he will give them untold treasures. He rapidly regains health and strength, chiefly under the guidance of Ruth, the doctor's sister, and in six months all preparations have been made, and the party, including Ruth, embark for Peru. They meet in Panama a friend of Professor Lamson, Captain Hartness, who joins their party.

CHAPTER VII.

SOUTHWARD.

The voyage of the *Imperial* from Panama to Mollendo was as lacking in any element of excitement as such voyages always are, saving in times of war or revolution. It so happened that just now the whole coast was quiet from Colombia to Chile, a strange phenomenon which was destined to be the prelude to a battle-storm, compared with which all the wars and revolutions that South America had seen were to seem little more than sanguinary riots. As for those who were to be responsible for the social and political upheaval of a continent, they lived in the meantime their pleasant, easy lives as quietly and as unobtrusively as the most insignificant of the *Imperial's* passengers.



"Now it's no use frowning and looking black over it, Laurens."

Yet the undercurrent of their existence was not quite so peaceful as its surface, for a very serious question was demanding a speedy settlement one way or the other. Was Captain Hartness to be told the secret of Vilcaroya's past existence and the reason and manner of his return to the world of living things, or was he not? Djama steadily and strenuously insisted that he should not be told, while his sister and the Professor had somehow talked each other into the belief that there could be no harm, and possibly not a little good, in doing so. Ruth had, perhaps, the more decided opinion of the two, though nothing would have been further from the Professor's inclination than to admit that he had been talked into his conviction by a young lady.

Vilcaroya, who, after all, was more deeply concerned than any of them, had but little share in the private discussions which took place every evening in the double cabin which he shared with the Doctor and the Professor. But the night before the steamer entered the Bay of Callao he somewhat astonished them both by quietly but decisively telling them that he wished the English warrior to be his friend and companion, and that therefore if they did not tell him the whole truth, and offer him a share in the expedition, he would do so himself.

"And I," said Ruth, who as usual was present at the conference, "shall tell Captain Hartness that every word of the Inca's story is true as far as we know. Now it's no use frowning and looking black over it, Laurens. As I have said over and over again, Vilcaroya has a perfect right to say who shall or who shall not share this wonderful secret of his, and if Captain Hartness is willing to go with him and help him I don't see that any of us have any right to try and prevent him. Really this prejudice that you seem to have taken against the Captain is much too unreasonable to be worthy of a man of your intellect and perception. I always thought you rather prided yourself on your keenness of perception. What any one can see to object to in Captain Hartness I really can't imagine."

"No, I don't suppose you can," replied her brother with a look and a smile that brought a flash into her eyes and a quick bright flush into her cheeks. "I have always heard that acquaintances ripen very rapidly on board a ship, and I certainly think that we have had a case in point. Let me see, we are seven days out from Panama——"

Ruth's dark slender eyebrows came just the slightest shade closer together and her eyes looked just a trifle brighter than usual, but there was not a trace even of vexation in her voice as she answered:

"My dear Laurens, that is the first attempt at chaff that I have ever heard from those serious lips of yours. I am afraid I can hardly congratulate you on its brilliance, but I am quite prepared to confess that of all the men I have ever met—not very many to be sure—Captain Hartness is quite the manliest and therefore the nicest; and so I for one should be very glad indeed of his company and protection during our journey among the mountains if he only chooses to come."

"Very well," said Djama in his easiest and pleasantest manner, "I see that public opinion is unanimously against me, and so of course I must bow to the decision of the majority. But as for any prejudice against the Captain, I can assure you you are quite wrong, he is a soldier and a gentleman, and I think a man every inch of him. My objection to telling him the story was first the fact that I have told him an entirely different one, and therefore shall look somewhat of a liar in his eyes, secondly that I have thought, rightly or wrongly, that for the present at least it was better to keep this business in as few hands as possible. However, it is decided that we shall tell him, and I have no doubt he will be as discreet as the best of us. Now to make amends for my disagreement, and what I suppose Ruth thinks my unpleasantness, I will go up on deck and find him and bring him in."

He rose from his seat as he spoke and left the cabin. In a few minutes he came back with the captain and said:

"There will be rather a crowd of us in here, and it's pretty hot. Suppose we adjourn to the drawing-room? There's no one there as it happens, and we can get a quiet corner all to ourselves."

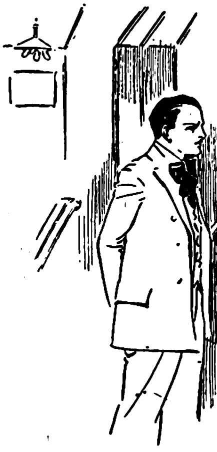
This was agreed to, and when they were settled in the luxurious "social hall" on the promenade deck, Djama told the Captain what they had asked him to come for, and then asked the Professor to tell the story.

Hartness gave no sign of surprise beyond a slight lifting of the eyebrows. All he said was:

"I know that you propose to tell me something of no ordinary importance, and before you begin I should like you to allow me to say that nothing is farther from my thoughts than any desire to trespass, in however slight a degree, in your confidence. At the same time, if I can serve any object of yours or of Señor Vilcaroya's, either in hearing it or afterwards, I shall be happy to do so. Of course, I hope I need hardly say that whatever you tell me will be as sacred as a gentleman can keep it."

"We know that, Hartness," replied the Professor. "If we had not been absolutely sure of it we should not have asked you to hear the story."

The Captain bowed slightly in his seat, and then the Professor began in a low but distinct tone, and told him in terse, matter-of-fact sentences the strange tale of the beginning of Vilcaroya's second life, and after that laid before him in brief outline the object of the expedition to Peru, and the intentions of the Inca should it prove successful.


Left the cabin.

"And now," he said, when he had finished the story, "of course you will see, Hartness, that we have not decided to tell you this without an object. Granted always that you believe what may well appear to you as the wildest romance, do you feel inclined to join us, supposing you can find nothing better to do when you get to Callao?"

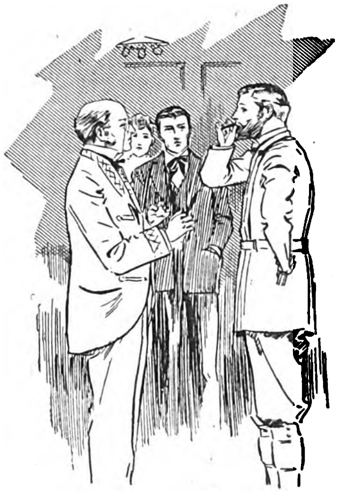
There was silence for a moment or two, and then Hartness looked up and saw Ruth's eyes turned on him with an expression that he had never seen in them before.

"As for believing your story, my dear Lamson," he said very quietly, "I may say that I have guessed a good deal of it since we left Panama, and so I am ready to believe the rest. With regard to your proposal, I accept it without a moment's hesitation, and if the ship was met with a deputation in Callao to-morrow offering me the presidency of Peru, with all the plunder appertaining thereto, I should respectfully decline to stay, so that's settled. Now, if I may make a suggestion, we'd better not prolong this conversation here, for someone may come in any minute. I propose that we adjourn to the saloon and drink a bottle of Irroy to the success of the expedition, and the health of his Imperial Majesty, Vilcaroya the First."

Four days later the party landed on the wretched mole at Mollendo, and the next morning took the train to Arequipa.

A great mental change had now apparently come over Vilcaroya, nor was the cause of it very far to seek. Day after day on the southward voyage he had walked alone up and down the promenade-deck, or stood gazing rapt in thought at the desert foreshore along which the steamer was running, and at the colossal masses of the dark brown, barren mountains, as they towered, range beyond range, till they overtopped the clouds themselves, and stood serene and sharply outlined against the blue background of the upper sky.

Behind those mighty ramparts lay the well-loved, well-remembered land over which his fathers had ruled in the good days before the stranger and the oppressor had come. On the other side of them he would find, as he too well knew, only the poor fragments of the great cities and stately pleasure-houses that he had known in all their pride and beauty—only the silent and deserted ruins of the mighty fortresses which had guarded the confines of the Inca empire from the incursions of the wild tribes which surrounded it, and furnished portals through which the armies of the Children of the Sun had marched to unvarying conquest. He had thought of the broad green level plain of Cajamarca surrounded by its guardian ramparts of terraced hills; of the long verdant valley of Cuzco, with its hundred towns and villages nestling amidst the foliage that shaded their streets and squares, and looking out over the green fields of the valley and the innumerable tiers of terraces that rose green and gold with maize, or glowing with flowers to the summits of the hills, and of that earthly paradise of Yucay wherein the Gardens of the Sun, the golden shrines of his lost religion, and the wondrous pleasure-palaces of many generations of Incas glowed in their almost unearthly beauty, embosomed in green, and gold, and scarlet in the midst of inaccessible mountains which themselves were overtopped by the mighty peaks of eternal snow that he had seen glimmering white and ghostly in the moonlight like guardian spirits around an enchanted realm on many a night of delicious revelry now far past and lost in the swift flood of years that had rolled by since then.

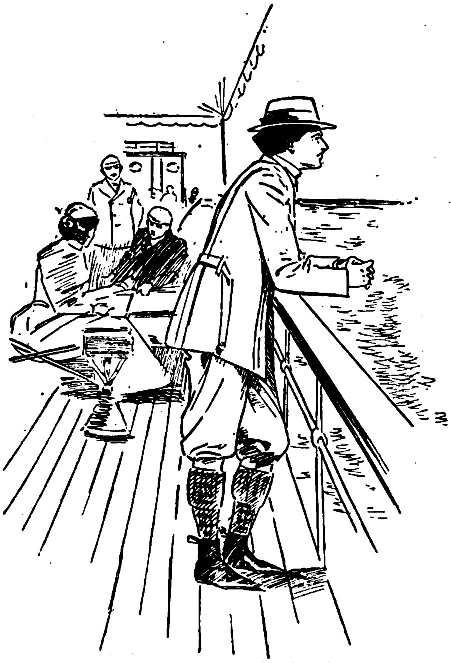

"Do you feel inclined to join us?"

It was to the poor remnants of all these glories that he was now returning to find the habitation of his ancestors laid waste, and the descendants of his people the slaves of strangers. The change which it had taken centuries to accomplish would be to him but the transformation of a day and a night and a morning. He had seen the last day of the Inca empire; he had fallen asleep, and he had awakened, and now, on the morrow of his sleep, he was coming back to the ruins which the slow pitiless work of the years and centuries had left behind it.

But no sooner did his feet tread the soil that had once been sacred to his father and deity the Sun, and his lips breathe the same air that they had breathed in his other life, than he remembered the ancient prophecy to whose fulfilment he had devoted himself, even to death, and how in him and this new life of his one part at least of that prophecy had already come to pass—and if one part, and that not the least, why not the rest? Far away beyond those towering tiers of mountains lay Golden Star in the resting-place to which she had been borne with him, sleeping soundly in the impassive embrace of their mighty arms.

And within the safe keeping of those arms there lay, too, that uncounted treasure, that vast legacy which the departed leaders of his people had bequeathed to him for the sacred purpose of restoring those glories which all men save himself now believed to be but a dream of the distant past, that incomparable inheritance of which he was the sole heir on earth, and which he had come to share with Golden Star on the restored throne of the great Huayni-Capac.

As he thought of all this the blood that had been so long stagnant during his magical death-sleep pulsed like living fire through his veins. His new life, with all its marvels, became glorified into a waking vision of new conquests and re-won empire. The past was a dream both sweet and bitter in its vivid memories, but still a dream that had been dreamt and was done with. The present and the future were realities, golden and glorious with a hope justified by the miracle that had made them possible. He had learned enough of the new age in which he had awakened to know that that lust of gold which had brought the conqueror and the oppressor into the land of the Children of the Sun burnt every whit as fiercely in the hearts of the men who were living in his new world, and that lust should now work for him and for the redemption of his people, and so that which had been their ruin should yet prove their salvation.



Stood gazing rapt in thought.

Thus through the long sunny days and starlit nights Vilcaroya, last of the Incas, had mused and dreamed, and now he was once more in the Land of the Four Regions, hale and strong and burning with the divine ardour of his sacred mission, ready to dare and do all things and to use unsparingly the tremendous power that would soon be in his hands to fulfil his oath and Golden Star's, and accomplish the work that he had come through the grave and gate of death to do.

End of Book I.

BOOK II.

For Love and Gold.

[With the landing of Vilcaroya and his strangely-acquired friends in Peru the diary of Professor Lawson, to which I am indebted for all the facts and most of the suggestions in the foregoing Book, suddenly and quite unaccountably breaks off, or perhaps I should rather say, expands into a mass of notes, archæological and geographical, unconnected by the slightest thread of narrative. Probably the learned Professor lost interest in the human element of his surroundings when he found himself once more on his favourite field of research; possibly, too, his near approach to what he doubtless believed would be illimitable wealth had by this time killed his interest in the wonderful destiny of the man whom his friend had, as it were, brought from the sixteenth into the nineteenth century. Happily, however, so far from the after-history of the Inca Vilcaroya being lost, it comes to us from the best and most interesting of all sources—his own hand. The manuscript, of which the following chapters are a translation, is written in his own Quichua tongue, and has been rendered into English for me, with such alterations of arrangement and expression as have been found necessary, by my learned friend, Professor Adolf Bandalier, of Lima.]

CHAPTER VIII.

The Inca's Oath.

As the time passes between dreaming and waking, so for me did the long years pass, flowing like a smooth and silent stream seen from afar, out of the darkness that fell so slowly and so sweetly over my eyes that night when I sank into the death-trance beside Golden Star, my beloved, in the bridal chamber that they made for us in the Temple of the Sun, into the light that shone into them when they opened upon a scene so different, and saw a white, haggard face bending over me, and two black, burning eyes looking into them. Then I closed them again and slept, and when I woke again there were two faces looking at me, both white and full of fear and wonder, and I saw two beings who seemed very strange to me, such as I had never seen among the Children of the Sun, standing by the couch on which I lay, and one of them fell down as though sore stricken, and I tried to think what this could mean, and thinking fell asleep again.

Then I dreamt a long sweet dream of the days that I now know were far past, when I, Vilcaroya, son of the great Huayni-Capac, lived in the Land of the Four Regions, a prince among princes, a warrior and a child of the sacred race whose blood had flowed unmixed through many generations from the divine fountain of life and light, our father the Sun. I dreamt of Golden Star, and the days when I loved her in timid silence, for she was the fairest of all our race, and so, as it seemed to me, destined to no less a lot than the motherhood of a long line of Incas, in whom should live, and grow to ever greater splendour, the glories of the race that owned no earthly origin.

I called to her in my dream, but she made no answer. I saw her lying by my side in that well-remembered chamber with the shadowy forms of the priests standing about us as I had seen them long before; but, alas, she lay still with closed eyes and lips that seemed to have forgotten how sweetly they once could smile. I whispered her name, mingled with many a loving word, into her ear, and still she moved not. I put my arms about her, and kissed her, and instantly I shrank back, shivering with a fear unspeakable for the form that should have been so warm and soft and yielding was chilled and pulseless, and rigid, as though some foul magic had changed it into stone, and the lips that should have given me back kiss for kiss were still, and cold, and senseless.

Then I saw, as it seemed with half-closed eyes, that dear shape of hers being borne away from me, while I, longing to snatch her from the hands of those who were robbing me of her, yet lay helpless on the couch without strength to move or speak until all grew dim around me, and I felt myself raised by invisible hands, and borne far away through the darkness, and so my dream melted away into the night of sleep.

Then, yet again, I woke and saw the two strange men that I had seen before, and one came and spoke to me kindly in my own tongue, and called me by my own name, and gave me food and drink, and told me in few, but to me terrible words that the dreams I had dreamed were dreams indeed—dreams of a time that was long past, of things that had passed away, perchance for ever, and men and women whose names were only memories.

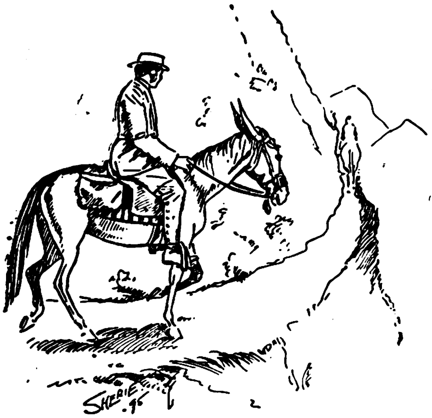
Thus did I come from the evening of one age into the morning of another, falling asleep in the prime of my strength and manhood, and waking again even as I had fallen asleep—though those who had closed my eyes had been dead for many generations, and the name of our ancient race was but a bitter memory to the sons and daughters of my own land amidst the mountains.

Then I went forth into the wondrous new world into which I had awakened, the world which you who read this hold so common, and which I found crowded with wonders so many and marvellous that if it had not been for the loving care of her who guided my first footsteps on my new journey, as she might have guided those of a little child, my re-awakening reason must soon have been quenched in the night of madness.*

So I came back to the shores of that well-loved land of mine which, by the reckoning of the new times into which I had come, had been for more than three hundred years the sport and prey of the generations of strangers and oppressors who had followed those first conquerors of the Children of the Sun, whose coming had sounded the hour of doom and ruin through the length and breadth of that glorious land of green plains and verdant valleys, of terraced hills and towering mountains, which had once been our empire and our home.

From the mean coast town of wooden houses where the railway begins we travelled ever upward over great grey sloping deserts and by rugged ravines with steep, broken walls of red earth and ragged rock, through range after range of mountains, that were all strange and hateful to me until we swung round the shoulder of a great crag-crowned mountain, and I saw across a vast plain, into which range after range of lesser hills sloped down, the crystal peaks of the snow mountains towering far beyond the clouds into the blue sky above them.

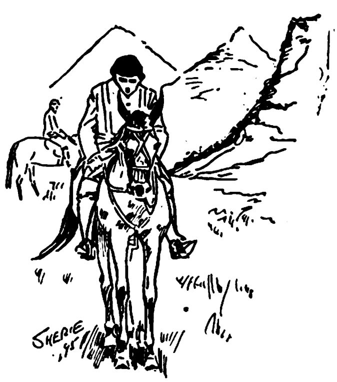
Then I knew that I was coming nearer to the land that had once been mine, and ere many hours had passed we stopped in a great city which still bore its old name of Arequipa, the Place of Rest, which my own ancestors had given to it. It was no longer the place of palaces and pleasure-houses, of flowery gardens and leafy woods that I had seen it, but above it still gleamed the white snowfields and shining peaks of Chanchani and Pichu-Pichu, and between the two great white ranges still towered the vast black snow-crowned cone of Misti, the smoke-mountain, rising sheer in its lonely grandeur twelve thousand feet above the sloping plain on which the city lay.



We journeyed on by road.

As I looked at it again for the first time after so many years I asked the Professor, as we all called him, if since I had been asleep the mountain had been rent asunder again as it had been in the olden times long before the Spaniards came to seek gold and blood in the Land of the Four Regions. He was very learned in such matters, even as Djama, his friend, who had awakened me from my long slumber, was learned in secrets of life and death, and when he told me that the fires within it had slept for more years than men could remember, I was glad—yet I said nothing of my inward joy, for had I told him all that I knew about the valley of black sand and yellow rock that was hidden behind the far-off wall of snow, that shone so whitely against the blue of the midway heaven, it might have been many a long day before we had again set out on our journey towards the place that was the goal at once of my hopes and fears.

We stayed seven days in Arequipa, making our last preparations for the work that lay before us, and then we went on again by train to Sicuani, in the valley of the Vilcanota. Then from Sicuani we journeyed on by road, riding on mules through a land that was lovely even in my eyes, though its loveliness was to me only the beauty of ruin and decay, for this was the heart and centre of that vanished empire whose glories no living eyes but mine had ever seen.



I bowed my bared head towards it.

I saw wildernesses where there had been gardens, and gaunt treeless mountains lying bare to the glare of the sun. Lakes that had shone encircled with gardens now spread out dull and stagnant over the neglected fields. A few ragged fragments of grey clay walls still rose from the green plain of Cacha, where I had last seen in all its glory of gold and rainbow colours the holy Temple of Viracocha; the great guardian fortress of Piquillacta, which I had seen stretching its impregnable length and rearing its unscaleable height from mountain to mountain, across the entrance to the once lovely valley of Cuzco, lay a huge ragged mass of towering ruins, splendid even in decay.

As we passed through the one half-choked portal that still lay open, I thought with heavy heart and bowed down head of the great fortress as I had seen it in the glory of its pride and strength, of the gallant warriors that had defended it, and the gay processions that I had seen winding in and out of its stately gates, making its hoary walls ring with songs and laughter, and, farther on, as we rode along the valley on that sad and yet eager three days' march of ours, I saw on the hill-spurs about me the black and ragged ruins of the fair cities and stately temples and palaces that I had seen crowded with happy throngs, bright with gold and colours, and so fair and strong that no man could have dreamed of the ruin the oppressor had brought upon them.

And so, journeying amidst all these sad memories through a land which, for me, was peopled with the ghosts of my long-dead friends and kindred, we came out at length on the broad, green Plain of the Oracle, and there before me, still nestling under her guardian hills, lay, glimmering white and grey under the slanting sun-rays, all that was left of the mighty city that had once been Cuzco, the City of the Sun and the home of His children, and as I raised my eyes and gazed upon it through the rising mist of my tears, I bowed my bared head towards it and swore in the sadness and silence of my desolate heart that, to the full extent of the power which I believed was soon to be mine, I would take life for life and blood for blood, and I would give sorrow for sorrow and shame for shame until I had paid to the full the debt which the long years of plunder and cruelty and oppression had heaped up against those who from generation to generation had brought this shame and ruin on the once bright home of the Children of the Sun.

(To be continued.)

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* Several pages of the original MS., descriptive of scenes and characters already familiar to the reader, are omitted here.

A CURE FOR NEGLECT.

SHE was sobbing bitterly. He was frowning wickedly. They had been married six months.

He had married her because he had fallen in love with her piquant brunette beauty. She had married him because she liked him as well as she liked any of her half-a-dozen suitors.

He was very fond of her still. But he was tired of her constant companionship, so tired of unintermittent conjugal felicity and constantly expressed affection that he almost fancied himself tired of her—of her, the pretty, dainty girl who lay—in the agony of her wifehood's first grief—lay with her silken head buried in the velvet cushions of her boudoir lounge.

She, on the other hand, had fallen in love with her husband. She had grown fond of him in the ardent days of courtship that had preceded the wedding. The warmer ardour of the first honeymoon days had kindled a spark of passionate love that had lain dormant in the girl's heart through two London seasons. The spark fell upon the quickened oil of young wifehood, and a great flame grew—a flame that inwrapped all her being; and this unexpected, burning, eager love had grown and grown with every hour of her wifehood.

Fred had been intensely pleased at first when he saw the big love grow up in his wife's heart. He had had grave misgivings once or twice before their marriage. He knew that Mabel had flirted sadly with Hylard and with other men. He had felt "a cold faint fear" that his preferable bank account had had something to do with her preference for him; but he had put the thought behind him as a man imprudently will when he is in love. Nevertheless it had been an inexpressible relief to learn that of a certainty his wife loved him—loved him with a love that absorbed every thought of her mind, every pulse of her heart.

The first intoxication of love gratified had passed away, and left him temporarily disinclined for further draughts of the sweet liquid.

He wanted a change for a time, and he was going away—going to shoot with some men in Scotland. And Mabel's heart was broken, or she thought it was, which hurts quite as much while it lasts.

"Mabel, dear, do be reasonable," he said, "I'm only going away for two weeks."

"If you loved me you wouldn't go at all."

Duncan groaned. He was face to face with one of the great difficulties of a man's life—the difficulty of teaching a woman that the love which is her "whole existence," is of man's "but a part"—of teaching her this without hurting her—of teaching her that this great sexual difference is a righteous, affectional dispensation.

"It's only a stag party," he began. The girl sprang to her feet, and her flashing black eyes were so beautiful that he felt half inclined to throw over the hunting party and stay with her.

"Only a stag party!" she cried; "I should hope so! If you were going without me to a place where there were other women, I'd kill you!"

He caught his pretty wife in his arms. He was going away in five minutes. He could stand a bit more love-making. He almost felt inclined for it.

"Mrs. Othello! Mrs. Othello!" he whispered, lifting the lovely tear-stained face to his. "My jealous darling! Now, for my part, I'm as trustful as Desdemona. I want you to have the best possible time while I'm away. Accept all your invitations. Spend heaps of money—you haven't bought a new frock since we've been married, have you? Don't you be dull, girly, because I've gone for a two weeks' shoot at the beginning of the season. Go everywhere; see everything. I'm sure Hylard will be delighted to play escort to you anywhere. You see, I'm not jealous. And I haven't forgotten how keen Hylard was to marry you."

Mabel drew back indignantly. Then she did what every woman does when it comes to an issue between her and the man she loves. She yielded—as Cleopatra yielded when Antony left her at the bidding of Cæsar. She threw her arms about Duncan's neck and kissed him.

"I hope you'll have a lovely time, Fred, darling," she said. "And, oh!" with a half-controlled sob, "remember every moment you're away that Mabel loves you—Mabel loves you."

* * * * *

Duncan stayed in Scotland three weeks instead of two. Then a great sudden longing to see his wife caused him to catch the first train for London.

When he entered his own hall the first thing he saw was a wonderful opera cloak that lay across the table. Then Mabel came out of the drawing-room door. Mabel, in a marvellous yellow dress, all satin and chiffon. The great Duncan diamonds flashed from every conceivable part of her person. Her bridal pearls were twisted carelessly in her hair. They were half hidden by a great jewelled butterfly.

"You!" she cried. "I'm afraid the dinner is all cold. But you can tell them to get you something quickly. I'm going out. I've three receptions and a ball. Don't sit up. Lord Hylard will see me home. Don't crush my flowers," she added, almost avoiding his kiss. She held up a magnificent bouquet. "Wasn't it nice of Lord Hylard to send me such a beauty? Did you have a good time, dear? Isn't my gown incomparable? I hope you won't be cross when you see the bill! The carriage? Yes, Binks, I'm coming."

She handed Duncan her long, elaborate wrap, and he helped her into it in a dazed way. "Binks, see that your master has something to eat," she said carelessly, and passed out.

That was three years ago. Duncan is a little laughed at now for clinging so closely to his wife's side. She, on the contrary, is very gay, and just the least neglectful of him. Often she stays his kisses with the cry "Don't crush my gown." He longs bitterly for the lavish girlish love he once spurned. Often in the night, when he sleeps, she lifts the yellow curls, and lays her sweet lips with passionate kisses on his forehead.

Is she foolish to hide part of her love from him? No; she is wise. If he knew how much she loved him he would love her less.

Is she unjust? No. He spurned the absorbing love he had voluntarily created. He deserves a life-long punishment. Is the man less guilty who breeds in a woman's heart a great love, and then neglects to feed it with kind words and loving acts? No; not a whit.

E. C. WAGGENER.

A CLEVER CAPTURE

To capture a slaver had, at one period of his life, been the great idea and dream of ambition in the breast of Commander Warner. But that was many years ago when he had for the first time donned Her Majesty's uniform as a midshipman in the essentially maritime town of Portsmouth. Time had gone on and he had steadily worked his way upwards, and now, at length, the object of his youthful desire was actually within his reach—chances of accomplishing it, moreover, were well within the bounds of possibility, seeing that he had recently been appointed to the command of a small armed cruiser whose destination was a coast where the authorities had reason to believe an illicit trade was being carried on in the way of slave dealing. His orders were to cruise in certain waters, and, if possible, intercept one or other of the suspected vessels.

In these piping times of peace, there is not so much chance for earning prize money in H.M. Navy as was the case formerly, and the prospect of "making a bit" was no less alluring, probably, to the officers than to the crew of the *Lapwing*, so that it is not to be wondered at that all through the outward passage the feeling on board the cruiser was one of pleasant expectation, and that a general alacrity to obey orders with willingness and despatch was more than usually apparent.

Once arrived in the blazing atmosphere of the tropics, however, things became different. For the first few days the anticipation that any day a suspicious craft might come in sight served to stimulate the spirits of all on board, but after a while, during which nothing eventful had occurred, a general feeling of listlessness prevailed. Well it might, seeing the excessive heat existing, and when not on duty the crew were quite content to do their best to keep themselves from bodily melting away without troubling much about anything else.

One day, however, a shout from the masthead of "Sail ho!" effectually dispelled the existing feeling of lethargy, and the Captain, who had gone below in the hopes of finding his cabin cooler than the deck, hastily appeared.

"Where away?"

"A couple of points on the port bow, sir."

"What do you make of her, Mr. Graves?" was the Captain's anxious inquiry of the first lieutenant, who, glass in hand, had been carefully scanning the stranger ever since she had been sighted, until, the wind being light, and the *Lapwing's* engineer having, in compliance with the Captain's order, gone ahead full steam, the distance between the stranger—a long three-masted schooner, with tall raking masts and lying low in the water—and H.M. cruiser had been sensibly diminished, and the two vessels were now within range of each other.

"She is a flyer, sir, I'm thinking, and if she can only get a bit of breeze she will as likely as not get away from us yet."

"She shan't sheer off without disclosing her name and nationality," replied the Captain, with a look of determination about his lips which did not betoken too favourably as to the schooner's reception.

"Mr. Johnson," to an officer standing by.

"Yes, sir?"

"Give the order to fire a blank cartridge, and signal to her to give her name and nationality."

"Aye, aye, sir."

In another instant the sullen boom of the gun rang out over the water, and almost immediately the schooner hoisted the American colours.

"She is bearing away, sir," was the report of a warrant officer, saluting as he spoke.

"The deuce she is; that game won't pay, I can tell her.

"Reload your gun, Mr. Johnson, and put a shot in. Signal again for her name, colours won't do for me."

The order was obeyed, but elicited no response.

"Fire a shot—well in front of her bows."

Again the boom of the gun rang out, but there was a distinct difference in the sound; instead of a loud report only, as before, the second discharge was accompanied with an ominous growl, as if to say: "Now, then, no nonsense, you know."

The effect was little short of magical. There was a hurrying and scurrying on the schooner's deck; first one flag was run up, then another, until when the signal was completed those on the cruiser could make out that together they denoted a name the *Black Swan*.

"H'm, a mighty suggestive title. Just look up the U.S. Merchant Registry, Mr. Graves."

"No such name here, sir," was the answer, in an excited tone.

"Very well, then—signal to her to heave to, lower a boat, and take half-a-dozen men with you, Mr. Graves, board her, show your authority, and demand to inspect her papers. If they are in order make the best excuse you can, and return at once; but keep your eyes about you and note anything which seems suspicious—above all be circumspect whatever you do; I don't want a wigging from the Admiralty."

"Aye, aye, sir;" and in less than a minute one of the cruiser's boats manned with the officer and six men had been lowered, and the crew, bending to their work with a will, were soon alongside the schooner.

With the eye of a practised seaman Lieutenant Graves took in all that was noticeable about her at a glance, and in addition to noting that she was unmistakably a fast sailer, there was a generally rakish look about her that did not inspire his confidence.

He was received politely by an easy-going individual, clad in light nautical costume and speaking with a strong American accent.

"Guess yonder boat is a Britisher."

"She is H.M. cruiser *Lapwing*, and I have come on board to see your papers, if you please."

"Certainly, there there are," and he handed them over. They appeared to be in order, and the Lieutenant thought it well to be cautious.

"What's your cargo, may I ask?"

"Dry goods generally."

"I couldn't find any *Black Swan* in the Registry."

"Couldn't ye, now. Wal, you see, this here is a new craft, and we, not long bein' in command, haven't had time to christen her properly yet, but there's a bit of wind coming up, I guess, and I've been here about long enough, so if you're satisfied p'raps you'll go back the way you came."

"But I'm not satisfied."

"Is that so, Mister?"

"Yes, it is," replied the Lieutenant, exasperated by the other's slow, aggravating manner. "I want to have a look at your cargo, so kindly give orders to knock the hatches off."

"I guess I'll do nothing of the sort, Mister. I don't know what right you have to come aboard a United States merchantman and demand to inspect the cargo as if I was a tarnation slaver, and I can tell ye there'll be more heard of this before I've done. I shall report the whole circumstance, and the quicker you take boat the better."

In face of this, practically speaking, command, the Lieutenant had no alternative but to obey, and in a short space of time had regained the deck of the *Lapwing*.

"What's your news?"

The Lieutenant detailed what had occurred, and wound up by saying: "I am convinced, in my own mind, she is a slaver, sir."

"But you say her papers were in order."

"Apparently, sir."

"Then I can do nothing, I am afraid. Did you notice which course she was taking?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, then, lay our head in the same direction. We may come up with her again in the morning. There's only a light wind, and she can't get away far in the night."

There was considerable discussion amongst the crew, before turning in for the night, as to the probabilities of ever seeing the *Black Swan* again, and the interest was intensified by one of the boat's crew stating most positively that the schooner had at some time borne a name on her stern, and that it had evidently been painted out early in the morning. All doubts that might have existed as to again viewing the schooner were dispelled, as there, right ahead of the cruiser, lay the *Black Swan*, and the wind having died away, she was practically becalmed.

The Captain hastily came on deck on hearing the welcome news, and at once ordered the engineer to go full steam ahead.

"Signal to her to heave to, Mr. Graves, and if she doesn't, fire a shot across her bows."

There was no need, as it happened, to resort to any such drastic measures, the schooner, in response to the signal, coming head to wind at once and remaining stationary, presumably divining the Captain's intention and thus notifying her skipper's willingness to receive a second visit from the *Lapwing*.

"Ha! that's sensible, now; the fellow knows he has no chance of getting away in this light breeze, and is going to make the best of a bad job and surrender. Give orders to lower the pinnace, Mr. Graves, and take a full boat's complement, well armed; you never know in these cases; that chap may make a fight of it, after all."

On boarding the schooner the second time, the Lieutenant's reception was altogether different to what it had been before—a younger man than he had seen on the last occasion deferentially awaited his arrival on the deck, and announced himself as in temporary command, the skipper, he explained, being below.

"I mean having your hatches off this time," was the Lieutenant's opening remark.

"I beg your pardon, but I am not accustomed to be spoken to in this way."

"Well, whether you are or not, that's nothing to do with me. I demand the removal of those hatches, and here's my authority; are you going to let your crew remove them or must I summon my men to do so for you?"

"I shall certainly not comply with such an unreasonable request. You can do what you like," turning on his heel as he spoke.

Five or six of the schooner's crew had in the meantime gathered round, and the Lieutenant hesitated for a moment, mindful of the caution his commander had given him—"don't do anything rash, whatever you do," but his blood was up, and, leaning over the ship's side, he gave the order for a score of his men to come aboard.

Needless to say the order was obeyed with alacrity.

"Now, my lads, off with those hatches."

Two score of strong hands obeyed the mandate willingly enough. No sooner had the first hatch been removed than the sickening effluvia which ascended was enough to proclaim the truth. Several hundred slaves were stowed away as closely as herrings in a barrel.

"Now, sir," with a tone of exultation, "perhaps you will admit my suspicions were not unfounded?"

The young officer made no direct reply.

"It is, I believe, sir, the custom of your country to treat prisoners of war with humanity. I and my crew are in your hands. All I ask is that we be not subjected to the indignity of being put under restraint until, at all events, we reach the nearest port, to which I presume it is your intention to convey us. And I would esteem it a particular favour if you would allow us to remain on board our own vessel. Our crew is only a small one—twelve all told—and you can easily spare a sufficient number of men from your vessel to navigate this schooner, and," with a smile, "act as guard over us."

The Lieutenant was an officer and an English gentleman to boot, and was not disposed to crow over a vanquished foe.

"The disposition of the schooner's crew, sir, is a matter for my commander to settle, but I will represent your wishes to him."

To signal the fact of the capture to the *Lapwing* did not occupy long, and so near were the vessels to each other that the ringing cheer which went up from the excited crew still remaining on the cruiser could be plainly heard, and was heartily responded to by their elated companions on the schooner.

"I congratulate you most heartily, Mr. Graves, on the way in which you have carried this matter through; how many men will you want, do you think, to work the schooner into port, and leave a sufficient number to be responsible for the crew?"

"I was thinking, sir, that, subject to your approval, the better plan would be to take her in tow. We have a good supply of coal left, and, the wind being so variable, we may be some days making the nearest port."

"An admirable suggestion on your part. Yes, that will be by far the best, and then it will only be necessary to put a guard on board."

Shortly after the schooner, with her living cargo, was being towed astern the *Lapwing*, and in the course of less than a week had been triumphantly taken into port. The advent of the two vessels was, as might have been expected, the cause of considerable excitement; but the climax arrived when the U.S. maritime representative boarded the *Lapwing*, and cordially thanked her commander for having assisted the officers and men of the U.S. man-of-war *Warspite* to bring their prize into port.

The whole mystery was cleared up by the appearance soon afterwards of the easy-going individual whom Lieutenant Graves had seen on the first occasion, no longer attired in loose, easy-fitting flannels, but in all the resplendency of a U.S. naval uniform.

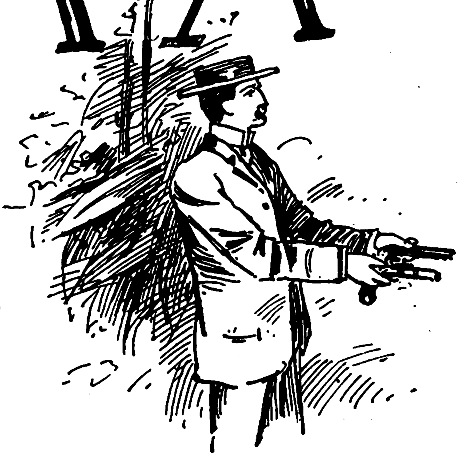
"Guess you're considerable smart, Mr. Graves, but you didn't ask me who I was when you came aboard the first time; otherwise, I might have saved you a lot of trouble, and told you how my boat, the *Warspite*, like yourselves, on the look-out for slavers, fell in with the *Black Swan*, when the Captain sent an officer aboard, your humble servant, in fact, just as yours did subsequently, and finding out what her cargo was, I obtained permission to transfer her crew aboard our own ship, and put 'em in irons. The Captain then assigned me a dozen of our own men to work her into port here, which you've kindly done for us. When you hailed us first, I guessed what was up, and we rigged ourselves up in some old clothes belonging to the original Captain and crew of the slaver. I was bound to make a bit of a pretence about not allowing you to uncover the hatches just for the fun of the thing, you know, thinking what a joke it would be to explain after, and if you had not insisted so peremptorily as you did, I meant, after a little palaver, to have given in as my first officer did later on. We guessed you'd follow us up; still, all's well that ends well; and if we can do you a similar turn some day, I shall be only too pleased. Slave-catching's a funny game, I guess."

"But what about the name being painted out?"

"Oh, yes; the slaver chap did that, not us; why should we?"

What Commander Warner said, *sotto voce*, had better be omitted. S. J. F. Newbery.

AN ARRANT COWARD



Ceylon is a country where matrimonial relations are apt to get a trifle strained. The usual opinion is that the climate is mostly at fault. So it was generally assumed by a society which could not afford to throw many stones indiscriminately, that the climate was to blame for the trouble between the Dexters.

It appears, according to experts, that a good deal depends on seasoning. The first two or three years are the trying ones. After that the matrimonial cart may be expected to go smoothly. That is why some men marry daughters of the land, or girls born on the island, in preference to importing wives from home. The unmarried man is wise in his generation, and tries to avoid running risks.

But Dexter had been foolish enough to become engaged to a girl at home, and in due course he married her. This interesting event happened at the end of his six months' leave, and he came back with his bride and set her down in the midst of his plantation, just as he would have brought a new kind of shrub and expect it to grow naturally in its new surroundings.

He was a reserved, passionless sort of man, who had never wasted much thought on the other sex, and it really did not occur to him that he was engaged in a risky experiment. He knew something, and had heard more, of what was going on round him. But it did not come within the range of his ideas that his wife should follow the example of other men's wives.

Mrs. Dexter was a very attractive little body, as was speedily discovered. At first she was rather taken aback by the novelty of her position, and was shy with her husband's old friends. As for the women-folk, she was not long in taking their measure and putting them on a proper footing. But with the male portion of society she was not so exacting or discriminating.

Anyhow, as time went on, the Dexters' house became a gathering place for several men, but very few women. Dexter himself did not seem to notice the distinction. All he noticed was that his wife kept up her spirits well after the first inevitable home sickness, and that she never complained of feeling lonely. He was not a very observant man.

If Mrs. Dexter had been wise, she would have taken care to divide her attentions. There is safety in numbers, and she really meant no harm. But she was young and inexperienced, and the man was neither. This happened about six months after the arrival of the little woman, and at a time when, as luck would have it, Dexter was more than usually busy.

The man had contrived to clear the field of rivals. He was not a particularly nice sort, though he was on such good terms with Mrs. Dexter. As regards reputation, he was one of the best hated men in the district—by husbands. And the strange thing was that he was not a good-looking man. On the contrary, he was rather ugly. Perhaps it was his swagger and bounce that proved irresistible.

It became a matter of course for him to be in constant attendance on Mrs. Dexter. Not a day passed that they did not spend almost entirely together, walking, riding, or driving. The people in the neighbourhood looked on with interest. They expected a repetition of the old story. And in the nature of things it happened that the husband was the only person ignorant of the threatening tragedy.

One day, however, Dexter was suddenly brought to his senses by a chance remark. It was not intended for his ears, but he heard it, and it went home. He followed its example, and having arrived at his own house, sat on the verandah and considered the situation for an hour and a half. At the end of that time he inquired for his wife. She was out, as usual, with the man; and the servant who answered his question seemed to treat the event as in the usual order of things.

Dexter did not try to obtain any more information. He simply went to his room and changed his clothes, rummaging about as if in search of something. Then he came out, looking quite cheerful, lighted a cheroot, and asked which way Mrs. Dexter had gone. Having learned this, he walked briskly in the direction indicated.

In the meantime Mrs. Dexter and the man were sitting together in a favourite dell, about half a mile away. She was rapidly approaching the stage where folly ends and guilt begins. Whether she would ever actually have transgressed is a delicate point. She had resisted the voice of the tempter successfully so far, greatly to the tempter's chagrin.

They had, in fact, reached a positive difficulty. He was getting rather angry, and she was not exactly happy, so that it was something of a relief to both of them to hear some one approaching. They neither of them expected Dexter. He was supposed to be some miles away, shooting.

Unfortunately, their calculations were wrong, for it happened to be Dexter who disturbed their solitude. He knew his way well, and came straight into the opening, to find them sitting side by side on a fallen tree; and when he saw them he stopped for a moment and looked at them, a grim smile on his face.

They both saw him at the same instant. The man jumped up hastily. As for Mrs. Dexter, she uttered a slight scream. The husband was the coolest of the three.

He walked up to them slowly, with the smile gradually effacing itself. The man was far from happy. He saw danger in the pale face and steady eyes, and under his swagger he was, like most of his class, as arrant a coward as ever walked.

Mrs. Dexter simply sat still where she was, her eyes glancing alternately from the man to her husband and back again. After her first exclamation she did not utter a syllable.

Dexter did not waste many words.

"You confounded blackguard," he said.

The man had expected something more violent. Then, cur-like, he began to pluck up courage. He even began to swagger a little, as usual, and stood up straighter. But Mrs. Dexter, who was watching him closely, noticed that his hand trembled as he curled his moustache.

"I have been thinking the matter over," Dexter continued, "and it seems to me that one or other of us is superfluous. I can only see the one way to settle the difficulty. Here we have a fine, open spot, well lighted, and in every way desirable. We have also a couple of weapons, and, in addition, a lady to give the signal."

As he spoke, he produced from his coat pockets a brace of revolvers. "They are exactly similar and both are loaded. Pray examine them and make your choice. Then we will agree to a distance and begin."

He grasped both pistols and held them out to his opponent, looking him keenly in the face the while. Mrs. Dexter had risen and walked up to them. Husband and wife kept their eyes fixed on the man's face.

But the man did not offer to take the revolvers into his hand. His swagger had gone. His cheeks shook like a jelly fresh from the mould, his lips worked convulsively, and his hands quivered. As Dexter moved nearer to him, he drew back, shrinking from the outstretched pistols.

And Dexter smiled.

Mrs. Dexter did not smile. Her face suddenly became crimson. Then, with an irresistible impulse, she clenched her fist and struck the man smartly across the mouth.

"Coward!" she exclaimed.

The word seemed to cut him like a knife. He staggered back a pace or two, gazed blankly from one to the other, and then fled.

They listened to his retreating footsteps without speaking. Then Dexter quietly put the revolvers back into his pockets, and turned on his heels to go home.

As he did so, he looked back over his shoulder to where his wife stood, with her face buried in her hands.

"Is there any reason why you should not come with me?" he asked.

She lifted her head, and for a moment her eyes flashed with indignation, and her face became red with sudden anger. Then, as quickly, she subdued the feeling.

"You have the right to ask," she answered humbly. "No, there is no reason."

And then he put his arm round her, and they went home together.

G. F. B.

A WAXEN HEAD.

A Study of Madness.

YES, I killed him.

But why? you ask. Ah, that is the question. The judge, the lawyers, and the jury cannot tell. They have ascribed all manner of motives to me. They have said that I was brutal and cold-blooded from my birth—a moral monster. Wrong—I am gentle almost to timidity. They have said that there was a woman in the case. Wrong—I scarcely knew the man, and knew no woman whom he knew. My advocate has said that I am mad, and that the waxen head reminded me of some woman whom I had loved. Wrong—I never loved but one, and she was dark.

The head, you will notice, is that of a blonde.

Yes, I killed him, and for what you will think a trifle—because he refused to remove a waxen image from the window of his hair-dressing shop.

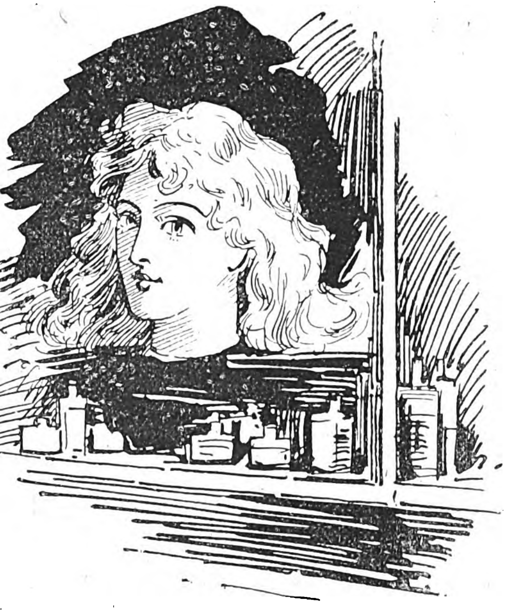
Odd, was it not?

Let me tell you the story. I was poor—miserably poor. I had come to the great city, as come so many men, in search of employment. Anything, whether hand-work or brain-work, would I willingly have done. But work I could not get. The first day I went to seventeen places. They were sorry there was no opening; possibly there might be; would I call again? and I was politely ushered out.

I waited. I called again. I was again rebuffed—a little less politely than before. I went to other places. The same experience. In all the great city there seemed no work for me to do.

I was gradually spending the small stock of money I had brought with me—all I had in the world. Finally it was gone. I pawned what few articles of jewellery I had, and continued my quest for work. At last I received some. It was copying, at a miserable pittance, but it was work.

My humble lodging was in a dingy street, and directly opposite was a hair-dresser's shop. In the window was an object, the sight of which annoyed me. In this life you meet persons who are repugnant to you, as well as those whom you like. To one of a sensitive nature, like myself, the same rule applies to inanimate objects. Even for tables and chairs I have my likes and dislikes.



It looked like a real head.

I crossed the street, and examined the object of my dislike. It was nothing—nothing but a Waxen Head. But it was disagreeable. It looked like a real head—a head cut from a body. It was not a bust, such as hair-dressers ordinarily have, but a simple head, cut off at the neck, and placed on a shelf, with a background of coarse, red cloth. A flowing blonde wig was upon it, and its glassy eyes had a metallic lustre. There was a mechanical smiled upon its painted lips—a disagreeable smile. Almost a contemptuous smile. And I could not help thinking that the Thing looked superciliously at me.

I finished the copying I had, and went for more. None to be had. Again I went my weary round. No work. Dispirited and melancholy, I returned to my lonely room. It was after dark. The hair-dresser's window was faintly illuminated by a sickly, spluttering lamp. But in the darkness there shone out two brilliant points of light.

They were the eyes of the Waxen Head.

I began to grow alarmed, despite myself. Could the Thing be acting on my brain? Was I in danger of madness? But no; what folly; I would not look upon it. I would avoid gazing out of the window. For a week I would not let my eyes fall upon it. But it was not without an effort. I experienced veritable tugs at times, pulling me round to look at the Waxen Head. But I resisted.

At last one night I was returning home just after dark. The window was not lighted; I was safe. Just as I reached the front of the shop a lamp-lighter touched a street lamp near by. The flame shot from the jet, the light fell upon the window. Starting out of the darkness I saw a mocking head.

I could not restrain myself. I entered the shop, determined to make the owner remove the hideous Thing. As I crossed the threshold a smug fellow advanced, bowing, smirking, and rubbing his hands.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"Nothing," said I; "that is, nothing in the—what a very singular head you have there in the window."

"Do you think so, sir?"

"Yes. Can it be possible that it is of any use to you?"

"Oh, yes; it serves to attract customers, and to display wigs. And then, you know, it is one of the accessories of our business."

"But," said I hotly, "why do you not have a bust? You certainly should have a bust." He was staring at me. I went on more calmly. "Besides, with a bust, a handsome pair of shoulders, a necklace or something of the kind, your window would look much more attractive."

"Very true, sir," he replied, "but such things cost money, and money, sir, is not very plentiful in this shop."

I grew excited again. I could not help it. "I do not care," said I; "that object there looks like a genuine head—a human head. There are people whom such things affect. A nervous shock might be caused——"

He burst into a roar of laughter.

I changed my tone. I became humble. I admitted that the head produced a sinister impression on me, and begged him to remove it.

"Why," said he, "if you are so nervous, you had better change your lodgings. It is easy to do that. I do not see why I should injure my business on account of your whims."

He was right. I could not rightfully ask him to do it. But change my lodgings—what a bitter jest! I could not pay for those I had, much less secure new ones, with payment in advance required. I went out dejectedly, my head bent, and left the thing still in the window. And yet they call me ferocious!

But my torture was only begun. The barber told his neighbours of my visit. I became a show for the giggling shopkeepers. They would watch for my goings and comings, and when I passed the window, with averted face, they would chuckle and sneer. Even the little children would point their fingers at me, and their childish trebles would join the sneering laughter of the elder fools.

One day my friend Arnold came to see me—the only friend I had in the great city. He brought good news—he had secured a place for me as clerk in an office. The pay was wretchedly small, but it was a place. I could have wept for joy. I pressed Arnold's hand convulsively, and thanked him as few men are thanked. I was to take the place in two days. He left me a happy man.

The next evening I was seated in my room. It was cold, and I was shivering, for I had no fire. It was the 20th of February. Oh, yes, I remember the date. I can never forget it. As I sat there, thinking over my unexpected good fortune, and pinching myself, partly to keep warm and partly to be sure I was awake, I heard a knock. I opened the door. A letter. I unfolded it and read:

> Dear Sir,—We regret to inform you that the position which was secured for you in our employ by Mr. Arnold is no longer vacant. It has been filled by the appointment of a relative of one of the members of the firm.—Yours very truly, ———

I crumpled the letter convulsively in my hand. The room began to whirl round me. I staggered and fell to the floor.

When I recovered my senses a new and strange light fell upon my dazed eyes. The curtain was drawn, but still the light came through. Mechanically I pulled aside the curtain to see what it could be; I recoiled. For the barber had fitted up his window with gas-jets, and in the centre of an aureola of ten lights appeared the Waxen Head.

I glanced at it. There was the same haughty look from its glassy eyes, the same sneering smile upon its painted lips. They moved—I vow I saw them move.

With a hoarse cry I bounded from the room. In two seconds I was in the villain's shop.

"Scoundrel!" I hissed, "you have mocked at me—you shall never again have the chance."

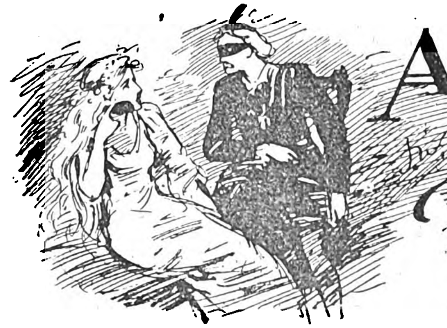
"Pooh!" said he insolently; "what's the matter with you? Go and sleep the drink off."

There was a sneer upon his fool's face as he spoke.

A knife came to my hand.

There was no sneer upon his white face when he died.

Jerome Hart.



A Strange Request

BIBLIOTHECA·BODLEIANA

SOME years ago I was spending a few weeks in Paris. My business had been successfully accomplished, but I still lingered on, awaiting the arrival of my old college friend and chum—Maurice Owen. We had not met for many years, but this was entirely owing to circumstances which had cast our lives apart. At the time I refer to I was expecting my friend the next day, and wondered how I could best while away the intervening time.

While pondering this question, my attention was attracted by a large placard announcing that a masked costume ball would be held that evening at the Maison Foisson, Rue de la Concorde. For a moment I hesitated, but my decision was soon made. What better could I do to pass a few hours? I retraced my steps and sought the shop of Maître Pierre, where I knew that a large choice of costumes could always be had on demand.

Maître Pierre showed me a variety of fancy costumes, but none of them were to my liking.

"Ah!" he suddenly exclaimed, rubbing his fat hands together, "I have the very thing for Monsieur. See here, only this morning the gentleman who ordered two costumes of Hamlet a week ago, returned one, saying he would not require both, but he paid for them, and well, too."

It was the very thing I wanted, and fitted me to perfection. After selecting a suitable mask, I left the shop, well satisfied with my purchases.

On entering the ballroom at ten o'clock that night, I looked round with some interest to discover my double, but as far as I could see I was the only representative of Hamlet then present.

I amused myself for some time by watching the dancers as they glided swiftly past, and wondered what secret joys and tragedies the masks concealed. My attention was suddenly arrested by a light pressure on my arm, and turning round I found myself face to face with the Hamlet of my previous speculations.

"Pardon me for addressing you," the unknown exclaimed in a voice that seemed strangely familiar, "but I find myself in a very awkward position, and am obliged to throw myself on the generosity of a stranger for assistance."

Here the masked Hamlet paused. I bowed slightly, and inquired what service I could render him.

"I came here with a lady," he explained, "and I have just discovered that I must have left a most valuable diamond ring on my dressing table at the Hotel d'Angleterre. It is a ring I value greatly, being, indeed, an heirloom of the family. I do not wish to trouble the lady with my loss, and could easily absent myself half an hour, if you would stay by her until my return. She is dressed as Ophelia."

"But surely," I objected, "the lady you refer to as Ophelia will detect the difference, and——"

"No, no," he interrupted eagerly, "you have nothing to fear. The lady and I have decided never to refer again to the subject of our recent conversation, and you can readily converse with her on any commonplace topic. You will find her rather absent-minded, but that will only make your task the easier."

I felt a singular reluctance to comply with the stranger's request, but curiosity, and a certain sense of humour at the novelty of the situation prevailed, and I expressed my willingness to take his place. The unknown was profuse in his thanks.

"You will find her in the little recess to the right of the balcony," he added, hastening away before I had time to repent of my good nature.

"There is no help for it now," I reflected, as I mounted the staircase to the balcony. I had no difficulty in finding the object of my search, and seated myself in the vacant seat at her side. She took no notice of my presence at first, and I was only too glad to be spared the necessity of conversing. Her thoughts were evidently not of a pleasing nature, for her eyes bore traces of recent weeping.

"Have you not forgiven me yet?" she said appealingly. "I have suffered terribly, God knows how much. Indeed, I have no right to be here at all, and if my husband knew——" Here she broke down, weeping bitterly.

I was dismayed. This was more than I had reckoned for, but before I could frame a reply she broke in hurriedly:

"And if you have given him too much ether, if he should remain unconscious, if——" her voice failed her, and she hastily put up her handkerchief to her eyes.

My curiosity was now completely aroused, and under the pretext of obtaining a little fresh air, I suggested she should remove her mask for a few minutes.

"Do you think it is safe to do so?" she queried.

"Yes, perfectly," I replied, "there is no one near, and a little fresh air will do you more good than anything else."

She removed her mask without any further hesitation, and to my unbounded astonishment, I recognised her as the beautiful Mademoiselle Adelaide Etienne, whose picture had appeared in the leading society papers a month ago, on the occasion of her marriage with the rich advocate, Monsieur Dubrey.

It was no secret that the marriage had been purely a mercenary transaction on the part of the parents, who regarded the rich suitor's money as an adequate equivalent for the great disparity of years. I was too overwhelmed with dismay at this discovery to find words for the moment, and greatly to my relief, I saw that the real Hamlet of this modern tragedy had reentered the dancing-hall.

"Pray excuse me for a moment, I see a friend below," I stammered out, and without further ceremony I hurried down the broad staircase. My double met me at the foot of the stairs, and after ascertaining that he had secured the missing jewel, I quitted the festive hall. My mind was in a strange state of tumult; indignation gave place to pity in my heart, as I thought of the beautiful face that had looked up at mine with such wistful entreaty. For the first time I felt that the remembrance of a woman's face would haunt me, do what I might, go where I would—and that woman the wife of another man.

Wild dreams troubled my sleep that night, and it was with a vivid sense of relief that I saw the dawn herald in a new day. While glancing at the morning paper my attention was arrested by a paragraph headed "A Suspicious Death," and running my eye rapidly down the column, I read the account of Monsieur Dubrey's death the night before, from an overdose of ether.

Suspicion, it was said, pointed to the wife, who had been arrested on her return to the house. I snatched up my hat, and on the impulse of the moment hurried off to the Bureau of Police, intent only on clearing the young wife from so terrible an accusation. My statement was gravely received by the detective in charge of the case, and after taking down my deposition, I was informed that my attendance would be necessary at the forthcoming trial.

The remainder of this dreadful tragedy is soon told. I was present at the trial, and to my horror and despair I recognised in the accused accomplice and lover of Madame Dubrey the friend of my youth, the friend whose advent I had been daily and hourly expecting. I turned sick and faint at meeting him again under such terrible circumstances. He pleaded guilty of manslaughter, no doubt with the idea of exonerating Madame Dubrey from any share in the fatal deed.

The jury brought in a verdict of wilful murder against Maurice, but recommended him to mercy. Adelaide Dubrey was acquitted, but I can never forget the awful look of despair on her face as she heard her lover condemned to penal servitude for life. She staggered out of the court in a half-dazed condition, like one bereft of reason. I would feign have spoken to her and offered some word of sympathy, but the frozen look of horror on her face held me silent. No comfort could avail aught to mitigate a grief like hers. The next day, when they came to wake her, she was found dead, and by her side an empty bottle of chloroform.

So began and ended the brief and only tragedy of my life.

F. White.

LADIES! LADIES!! LADIES!!!

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The Passing of Jack Thompson.

There were four of them—all barristers—seated by the window of a cosy room overlooking King's Bench Walk, in the Temple.

The youngest was the first to break the silence which had existed for several minutes.

"Whoever heard of a man going to a hospital for his heart before," he said, looking over the trees—light green in the pale sunshine of an early summer evening. "We miss poor old Creasy," and he began drumming a little operatic air on the window-sill.

"I don't know how we shall exist without his stories," observed a Q.C., with a quiet smile. "They say it will be a month or more before he is fit to move."

Someone sitting on the sofa produced a little bunch of manuscript written in a neat feminine hand. "If he cannot tell stories he can write them," he said; "this is for the *Illustrated Quarterly*."

"Read it," said the Q.C.; "anything to enliven us a little."

The man who had spoken hesitated a moment. Then he began:

"It is called 'The Passing of Jack Thompson,'" he said.

"CHAPTER I.

"It was February. The desolate and dreary prairie was covered with a light blanket of snow, save here and there bare spots where the cheerless wind had swept. The deflecting rays of the cold, low-hanging sun caused the burnished glass in the western windows of a little house standing off the old Santa Fé road to blaze as if on fire, and to seem to melt the freezing air.

"Half-a-dozen hounds bayed forth vociferous welcome to a horseman, their returning master, now ascending the steep road. A frail, dejected woman peeped through the half-drawn paper curtains of the low window, and, seeming to gather assurance, opened the door and stood upon its threshold.

"'Well?' she said interrogatively.

"''Tain't no use, Sal. Th' horse was found with my halter on her, an' that's enough to convict th' Apostle Paul.'

"'Why don't you go to ol' Judge Gilman. Tell him how little Bobbie was taken sick, an' how you just borrowed the mare to go for the doctor?'

"'Sal, will you dry up? I tells you 't ain't no use. He'd jest say 't was fer me to make it wash with the jury if I could.'

"'Why couldn't you, Jack?'

"'Why? Because I couldn't, I tells you. Do you hear that? If I'd a went to th' ol' Doc's house first an' had been ketched there, it might work, fer then he could swear fer me.'

"'Well, I'd be honest an' jest tell why Doc Tuff ain't on your side.'

"'I say 't ain't no use. This borrowin' of horses is gettin' to be too all-fired common. My lawyer, ol' Parsons, says it's a mighty thin go, though he do say, if I'll swear to it hard, an' you'll stand up to the same racket, he'll do the best he can; but he didn't make no bones of tellin' me his own mind as to th' outcome.'

"'Of course I'll swear for you, an' you know I'll do it cheerful, too. But what else did he say?'

"'He said 't would be deader medicine if we could prove a aliby while he had our hands in. 'Tis easy to see he don't take no stock in the sick child racket.'

"'God knows 'tis the Gospel truth, an' I hain't afeerd but what there'll be some of the jury that'll know the truth when they sees it. I recollec' a hearin' ol' Jedge Carson, when he was a ridin' the circuit, and used to stay with pa, say you could count safe on a findin' at least ten honest men in his box.'

"'Mebbe that rule would go them days in Missouri. But Jedge Carson was never up fer horse stealin' in Kansas, was he? I guess not. A feller has jest about got to prove hisself everlastingly innecent, or he's a goner.'

"'How does you make that out?'

"'Ol' Parsons says that th' Supreme Court, in Cassidy's case, made a law that th' havin' of a thing right away after it's stole is enough. That makes out a *primer face*—or some kind of a Latin landguidge case—which means, in plain United States, that you are in fer it, unless you can get out.'

"'Mebbe, Jack, if you 'll tell 'em of your conversion, an' a joinin' of th' church two years ago down to th' Stranger Creek camp meetin', 't would help. Elder Berry would recomember how you stumbled 'long up to the mourners' bench, an' give up so complete!'

"'Yes, an' he knows how darned quick I back-slid. That'd make a fine case, now, wouldn't it? What fer show would a feller have with nine out of ten Methodists, mebby, on the jury. I'd be no bigger'n a ten spot.'

"'But, Jack, mebbe God would move 'em to overlook your faults, for who is there that hasn't his own? Besides, mebbe there'll be some on the jury as isn't perfessors, an' will be prejudiced fer you. An' mebbe Judge Gilman would tell 'em that you was up fer horse stealin', and not fer back-slidin'!'

"'Mebbe he would, Sal. But what does you know 'bout juries?'

"And with that he fastened his horse and went inside the cabin disconsolately.

"CHAPTER II.

"The State *versus* Thompson had come up. The court-house was filled to overflowing with curious spectators and idle hangers-on. A number of witnesses were loitering about the courtyard waiting to testify. Here and there knots of sun-browned farmers discussed Thompson's case. A few expressed no opinion. Many said he was undoubtedly guilty. All agreed that there must be an organised band of horse thieves operating in the country, and suspicion fell on Jack Thompson as being a member thereof, partly because his farming seemed to be a mere pretence, but more especially because of his sudden disappearance and his frequent returns after several days of absence, often with a new horse, concerning which, when questioned, he always declared either he had won it at a race or 'swapped' for it.

"Everybody who spoke of Thompson's wife at all spoke well of her, and expressions of sympathy for her were frequent. 'She ought to leave him, for he treats her shameful,' was the general verdict as to her; while, as to him, it found expression in muttered, 'we've no use for the lazy, drunken thief, and gambler,' often accompanied by curses in menacing tones.

"There was no mistaking the temper of the community, and no one was more sensitive to it and its demands for a victim, upon whom its indignant wrath might be visited, than old Parsons, the defendant's counsel. Technical defences would only result in mob violence.

"After some delay, incident to numerous challenges, a jury of 'twelve good and lawful men' was duly empanelled and sworn, and was at once confronted by Mr. Idleman, the county attorney, who proceeded to state the case the State expected to make, and was followed by Parsons, who, in a low voice, very briefly stated the defence.

"Then the prosecution introduced its evidence. The ownership of the mare was proven to be in Deacon Ezekial Snoddy. Then the circumstances of her disappearance in the night from the barn of her owner—of her being found next morning tied to a post in front of a saloon in a town about fourteen miles from the point of asportation—of the defendant being seen hurriedly riding her into town at day-break, and of his being intoxicated when arrested, were all narrated by the witnesses. All of which, of course, it was shown occurred in the County of ———, and State of Kansas.

"It was remarked by a number of bystanders, who had heard of the adroitness of defendant's counsel, and of his skill as a cross-examiner, that he must have considered the case of the State impregnable; for there was scarcely a question put by way of cross-examination.

"The defendant then went into the witness-box. Under the skilful handling of his attorney he told in a simple way his story. Briefly it was this: His little child was taken sick on the night in question; he left home about two o'clock, taking a halter with him; upon going to his corral he found the bars had been thrown down (probably by some mischievous person or enemy), and his horses had gone to the woods; he then decided to go to his nearest neighbour, Deacon Snoddy, and borrow one; arrived there, he concluded, on account of the lateness of the hour, that he wouldn't awaken the sleeping household, but would go to the barn, take a horse, and explain matters fully to the Deacon on returning with Dr. Tuff in the morning; that when he arrived in town it was a little after daylight; the night having been cold, and he being faint and chilled by his long ride, he determined on taking a good stiff drink to brace him up before going over to the doctor's residence; that, after taking the drink in the 'Red Front Saloon' (for it was before the days of prohibition), he sat down by the stove in the bar-room to get warm, and must have fallen asleep, for the next thing he remembered was his arrest; that he then sent word by the constable to the doctor to go out to see his child.

"On cross-examination Thompson admitted that he understood the child was found up and playing when the doctor arrived; that he had not, previous to his arrest, said anything to the bar tender or to anyone else about his child's sickness; admitted that he once had a quarrel about a divisional fence some time before with the owner of the mare; he further frankly admitted that the halter found on the mare belonged to him.

"When Thompson was excused a smile spread over the faces of the bystanders. Evidently he had not made a favourable impression. He had not looked at the jury, but kept his restless eyes on the sheriff, as if imploring his kindly protection. Such expressions as, 'Too thin,' 'He's dead sure to walk,' and 'How long do you think he'll get?' were exchanged in audible whispers.

"Then the pale little woman in black, whose eyes had been riveted on the face of her husband during the narration of his story, entered the box. In a low voice she told of being awakened in the night by little Bobbie's croup; of her husband starting for his horse to go after the doctor; of her using the simple remedies at hand; and of Bobbie's being up and playing when the doctor came. On cross-examination, she admitted her husband had quarrelled with Deacon Snoddy, but stated that she thought it had been made up at the time her husband was converted.

"Here a titter went round the audience that occasioned the old bailiff to rap on the table three times with his knife, and to look threateningly at the standing men.

"The witness became excited; the colour came to her thin face; she stood erect, and her eyes brightened. Elevating her voice, her nostrils quivering with passion, she continued:

"'Those silly men may laugh; but, man'—addressing the jury—'Jack was converted the time our baby girl died, and he would 'a' stayed, had not the drink habit got such a grip on him, as it has, too, on lots of men I know who laughed out loud just now. Oh, I know you, Tom Green, and——'

"The Court interfered here, and cautioned the witness to confine her answers to the questions asked.

"The witness proceeded:

"'Before Jack got religion, Mr. Snoddy came over during the revival, an' brought along his hymn book an' Testament with him, an' sung, an' read, an' prayed, to beat all out of doors. He said he was wrong about that fence, an' asked the good Lord to forgive him for the scrap, too—which I doubt if He did—an' said that neighbours should dwell together in peace, an' all that kind of stuff.'

"The Court again admonished the witness to state only what was said and done, and to keep her opinions to herself.

"'Yes, sir; as I was sayin', the old hypocrite—there he sets now—said he was sorry, too, and he won't dispute a sayin' it neither, an' then he asked Jack an' me down to th' camp meetin', an' took on as if the Kingdom had come. Then he went, an' th' next Sunday Jack riz up for prayers, an' before I knowed what was on, ol' Deacon Snoddy was a hustlin' Jack for'ard to the mourners' bench, both on 'em a-shoutin' "glory" an' "amen" at every jump; an' afore the meetin' broke Jack was singin', "While the Lamp Holds Out to Burn," an' everybody was so happy that I couldn't keep th' tears back!'

"Here the witness, overcome by the memories which her narrative recalled, began to weep, and there was an opportunity for Idleman to collect his thoughts, and to renew the unfortunate cross-examination. The prosecuting witness leant over and whispered in his ear, to which the County Attorney made a responsive nod.

"'Mrs. Thompson,' he said sternly, 'do you mean for these gentlemen here—the jury—to understand that at the time of this larceny—that at, or just before, this horse was took—there was no bad blood betw'xt the families of the prosecuting witness and your said husband?'

“ ‘No, sir ; no, siree,’ the witness answered emphatically.

“ The County Attorney looked round the room with an air of victory, and proceeded deliberately to the attack, as he returned the little roll of tobacco wrapped in tissue paper to his pocket.

“ ‘Then you admit that there was bad blood ? ’

“ ‘I do.’

“ ‘ Will you be kind enough, Mrs. Thompson, to state wherein and whereof that bad blood consisted ? ’

“ ‘Yes, sir, if you wants me to, an’ it has any bearin’ on th’ case.’

“ The prosecuting witness pulled nervously at the shiny coat sleeve of the County Attorney, but as he had repeatedly done so before only to suggest irrelevant questions, Idleman paid no attention to him.

“ ‘ Madam, since we have started in, we might as well go on ; but I want the jury not to lose sight of the fact that we air a-tryin’ your said husband for larceny of a bay mare, and not the prosecutin’ witness for bein’ a Christian. You may proceed—state fully.’

“ Idleman emphasised the last two words.

“ ‘ Well, one night, as we was about to get into our waggon to come home from th’ revival, Mr. Snoddy says to my husband, says he : “ Brother Thompson, supposin’ Mrs. Snoddy gets up in front on th’ big spring seat with you—she’s a-gettin’ old and crippled up like with rheumatz—an’ I’ll ride behind with Sister Thompson ” —a-meanin’ me. We hadn’t more’n got started till Mr. Snoddy said, says he : “ Your seat, Sister Thompson, would be a mighty sight comfortabler if you had a back to it.” An’ then I felt his arm a-pressin’ close agin’ my back. I edged away, an’ he edged closer ; every time th’ wheel struck a rut he slid up, an’ didn’t slide back neither when th’ rut come his side. Then—— ’

“ ‘I object, as incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial,’ shouted the County Attorney, aroused by the titter that went round the room. ‘ This has nothin’ to do with the bad blood asked for, and is not responsive to my question.’

“ The judge removed his corncob pipe from his mouth, and wearily stretching his long legs on the corner of the bench, announced :

“ ‘Mr. Idleman, you asked the witness to “ state fully.” I don’t think after doin’ that you ought to be allowed to object to her manner of doing it. What the witness is about to state may, or may not, be material ; no one can tell till she’s stated. So I’ll overrule the State’s objection, Mr. County Attorney, and give you an exception, and you can move to strike out after the witness shall have done.’

“ ‘ Very well,’ said Idleman, obsequiously bowing to his Honour, and motioning to Mrs. Thompson to proceed.

“ ‘Then he put his right arm tighter than I thought was becomin’, an’ him a deacon, an’ I was so provoked I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t want to make no scene with his poor invalid wife, an’ her a good Christian woman as I thought then. So I jest pinched his hand as hard as I could, but he only hugged me harder. It took all the Christian grace I had to keep from yellin’, an’ he was afeared, too, for when I was goin’ to say somethin’ he’d clap his hand over my mouth. An’ we kept on that a-way till we got to their bars, an’ they got out, an’ th’ ol’ hypocrite thanked my husband perfusely. I was afeared to say anythin’ to Jack with his quick temper, so I jest made up my mind I’d put on my bonnet next mornin’ an’ go over to Mrs. Snoddy’s, which I did, an’ tell her jest how worldly her pretendin’ husband was. After I’d set awhile an’ we had went over th’ list to be baptised th’ next Sunday at the ford, an’ she had asked me to stay to dinner, I up an’ tol’ her jest why I couldn’t, as a Christian woman, accept her kind invite. She got boilin’ mad, an’ ’lowed if I hadn’t pinched Ezekiel’s arm he never would ’a’ hugged me, an’ that it was all my fault. The pretendin’ ol’ thing said Ezekiel had never hugged her a-comin’ home since they were married, if she’d pinched him for a signal. She jest kept right on a-tryin’ to put the blame on to me, till I left in a dudgin’, an’ we hain’t spoke since. Then as I was a-comin’ home, who should I see a-cuttin’ across th’ cornfield but that there same ol’ hypocrite, an’ him a deacon, too. When he gets up close enough, he says, says he, all a-beamin’ too : “ Sister Thompson——”

“ ‘ I says, says I : “ Don’t sister me, you old pretender.”

“ ‘ He says : “ What’s up now ? ”

“ ‘ I says, says I : “ I’ve been down an’ told your wife on you ; that’s what’s up.”

“ ‘ “ Told her what ? ” says he, a-pretendin’ ignorance.

“ ‘ “ You know well enough,” says I.

“ ‘ Then he says, says he—him a-gettin’ closer up, an’ reachin’ for my hand—“ Sister—or Mrs. Thompson——”

“ ‘ “ Stand back,” says I, indignant.’

“ Here the prosecuting witness moved restlessly and whispered in the receptive ear of counsel for the prosecution, and that functionary, perceiving a dangerous crisis was imminent, proceeded to object, and to ‘ strike out,’ getting into an animated discussion with the Court over the relevancy of the testimony. Counsel for the defence shrewdly realising that with the Court on his side the matter would be presented with sufficient convincing potency, said nothing. The Court, after overruling the objections and motions, and allowing exceptions to the State, again admonished the witness to state only facts.

“ A number of the open-mouthed by-standers whispered together—the consensus of opinions being that Judge Gilman was too learned in the law to permit the forceful Idleman successfully to pull the wool over his eyes. Parsons simply winked at his client.

“ The witness resumed :

“ ‘ Well, as I was a sayin’, that ’ol’ pretendin’ hypocrite there——’

“ ‘The witness will not express opinions, but state facts. Don’t call any names, Mrs. Thompson,’ cautioned the Court.

“ ‘ No, sir, I won’t ; but I could, though. Well, after that ol’ pretender—an’ him a deacon, too—got up a-close enough to shake hands, he went on to say as how I knowed th’ seat had no back to it, an’ that he jest didn’t mean nothin’ but to keep me from a-fallin’ out back’ards. An’ then—th’ cheek of him !—he ’lowed if I hadn’t pinched him—as if I did it before he did nothin’. You see, he was jest everlastingly bound to put it on to me, jest as that old huzzy, his wife, done. Then he says, says he : “ Sister—or Mrs. Thompson, ’t ain’t no use in neighbours havin’ words or hard feelin’s agin one another ; suppose we try to compromise it ? ” says he.

“ ‘ “ How can we,” says I, “ as honest Christians, compromise with Satan ? ”

“ ‘ “ Well, of course,” says he, “ we can’t do that if huggin’ is a sin ; but,” says he, a raising’ his hand to threaten, “ I’ll tell you what’s what if you ever tells your husband, or anyone else about that ride, I’ll be doddurned if I don’t tell the State’s Attorney your husband belongs to the Jones gang of horse-thieves." Them air his exact words. Well, then I got so mad at the ol' cowardly pretender that I jest rode off an' left him a-callin' fer me to come back an' make up. Do you think I went back? Not much.'

"'Why didn't you tell your husband about his threat?' propounded the persistent prosecutor, with an expansive feeling of self-admiration visible in his countenance.

"'Why didn't I? Well, because I knowed what ol' Snoddy said was a libel. He knowed all the time he was a-talkin' that Jack was no bigger a horse-stealer than his own self, an' him a deacon. An' I knowed if I told Jack that there would be a world of trouble; so I just considered it my Christian duty to keep low, an' so I jest kept mum, an' said nothin' till now—an' I reckon I wouldn' now if you, Mr. Idleman, hadn't started in on it.'

"The round of half-suppressed laughter that greeted this last statement stung the usually obtuse Idleman to the quick. Seeking to recover his composure, he nervously fumbled the court files, and made a side remark to the prosecuting witness, for the benefit of the jury, to the effect that he guessed an intelligent jury would know how much of her testimony to believe, seeing that she was an interested witness.

"At last the witness was dismissed. Old Parsons eyes twinkled, and he stroked his moustache and goatee, and ran his hand through his thin grey hair with an air of extreme satisfaction at the result of his adversary's cross-examination. Thompson's case, too, had evidently been strengthened in the minds of the bystanders.

"Then numerous motions were made, and special instructions were asked, all presumably aimed at getting before the jury the real points at issue. The court then, with greater verbosity than perspicuity, instructed the jury as to the law, laying particular stress on the intention of the defendant, and also on the presumption which arises when recently stolen property is found in the possession of another.

"The respective counsel then harangued the jury in the customary voluble and vociferous manner. Idleman and Parsons were both in their shirtsleeves, the latter *sans* vest and *sans* collar.

"At length the jury retired to consider solemnly of its verdict. Soon a loud and prolonged rapping on the door of the jury room imported a probable agreement. Then the twelve good men and true slowly filed in, the old bailiff bringing up the rear. No one could guess the result from their sphinx-like countenances. The clerk received the verdict from the foreman, and proceeded to read it in a deliberate tone. When he reached the closing words he hesitated as if astonished, glanced at the County Attorney, and said: '*Not Guilty.*'

"CHAPTER III.

"IT was dusk.

"A mule team stood lazily before the 'Red Front' saloon. A waggon cover was loosely thrown over some sacks of meal in the waggon behind the seat. Before long Thompson came out, a long-necked bottle projecting from one of the pockets of his sack coat, climbed to a seat beside the waiting woman, placed a six-shooter between them, and sullenly commanded her to drive on.

"On their way home, Thompson told his wife that some one said that it was her testimony, and her manner of giving it, that won the case.

"'Didn't I tell you what Jedge Carson said about a jury havin' ten honest men on it? I jest prayed hard to convert th' other two,' she observed.

"'But how did you come to give 'em that round up on th' Deacon, Sal?'

"'Well, I jest got kinder desp'rate when I see what a poor cut you made of it. Our lawyer said to just keep cool; that he'd let me off easy on th' direct, 'cause he knowed th' County Attorney would give me a chance to get in my work on th' cross. An' it seems I did.'

"'Sal, did th' ol' Deacon hug you as you let on like that?'

"'Of course he did. Wasn't I on oath? Does you reck'n I'd swear to a lie to save you, or anyone else, Jack Thompson? No, siree! You know I wouldn't.'

"'I'm mighty glad he did hug you, fur it saved me, dead sure, from goin' up to Lansing. But I'm blamed if I sees how you come to give it up in the box in th' powerful way you did, Sal.'

"'It jest popped into my head when I see Idleman was tryin' to make out you stole th' mare, to get even with th' ol' Deacon, or else to make it seem onlikely that you'd do your borryin' of him. It did go hard to tell it right out before all them men; but I done it 'cause you was my husband, an' 'cause I didn't want the neighbour children to throw 't up to Bobbie that his pa was in th' gaol for horse-stealin'. I could stand that.'

"'Well, ol' girl, you've broke the record as a winner. If I hadn't got gull, an' that fool Hank Blackman had 'a' showed up as he agreed fair he would do, th' Deacon's mare would 'a' passed along, layin' by daytimes in th' brush, an' travellin' nights, till she'd 'a' been over th' line in Clay County long ago. 'Tain't fair, Sal, I oughter tell you now, a-seein' as how you played white by me, an' saved me by yer tall swearin'. I reckon I'm th' fust horse thief as ever got off in Eastern Kansas.'

"'Thompson, does you mean to own up to me that you did steal the Deacon's mare?'

"'That's what, Sal. You see I agreed to do it that night, an' Bobbie's a-gettin' sick gave me an excuse to you fur to slide. An' that's the everlastin' truth, too.'

"'An' you belong to th' Jones gang?'

"'Yes; that's about the size of it.'

"'An' you'd have me swear to a lie to keep you from th' law?'

"'In course I would, an' you'd do it too—if not for me, you'd do it for little Bob!'

"Thompson here took the bottle from his pocket and placed it to his lips, as he already had done several times. His wife watched him askance. She knew that any protest from her would be received with curses, but she had grown as insensible to them as any woman compelled to drag through life tied to an ill-tempered drunkard ever grows.

"'Thompson, seems as though we'd had 'nough trouble for one day. I wish you wouldn't drink no more till mornin'. Please try jest this once? I don't want Bobbie to see me a-cryin' when we get home.'

"'Darn you; look on your book, will you? I don't want no woman who has been a-carryin' on with another man an' keepin' quiet till it is forced out o' her to be tellin' me what to do. Do you hear me?' Thompson sullenly responded with a most tantalising expression.

"There was a period of silence, during which the little woman, already overwrought by the nervous strain of the trial, and now so rudely shocked by the cruel audacity of her husband, tried to swallow the lump which seemed to come persistently into her throat.

"'Thompson, air you goin' to lick old Snoddy?' she ventured.

"'No, you bet I ain't. He can hug you again, if he likes to, fur all of me.'

"'Thompson—answer me true now—supposin' th' Deacon had 'a' went on an' done th' very worst a man could do—an' then, supposin' I'd told it in th' box, an' it had saved you from the pen, wouldn't you 'a' done nothin' to him fur it?'

"'I don't know as I'd a' made much fuss 'bout it.'

"'*Take that, you cowardly whelp!*' shouted a masculine voice from the rear end of the waggon.

"As Thompson fell backwards, his wife, turning, saw through the puff of smoke a man half concealed by some meal sacks, holding in his right hand a revolver, which he had quietly slipped from the seat as he had listened to Thompson's confession and audacious cruelty.

"'Hank Blackman!' gasped the confused woman.

"'Yes, the same ol' Hank what loved you back in Clay; he's been a-hangin' 'round these parts more'n you know, Sally, a-thinkin' mebbe you'd have use fur him some time.'

"'Don't tell me that you love me; you're a horse-thief an' a——. Oh, Hank, why *did* you do it?'

"''Cause I could stand it no longer to hear Thompson abuse you and refuse to fight for you, Sally. I won't let no woman be used in sich way, all the more you; 'sides, what he said 'bout my b'longin' to the Jones' gang 's a lie. I only trained with 'em to be near you, an' that's the God's truth.'

"'Oh, Hank, you oughter 'a' waited.'

"'Wait! Haven't I been a-waitin' patient all these years, an' seen you a droopin' an' a fadin' under bad treatment? It's done now. I may swing, but I'll know that you won't have to suffer no more from *him*.'

"The pale woman sat motionless and silent. At last, with an effort, she sobbed, 'Hank——' but speech failed her.

"Blackman caught her in his arms as she was falling from the waggon. When she had revived, he said:

"'Sally, 't ain't like you to give up so; be brave; remember that Hank 's your friend, your lover, and will wait for you. I must leave yer now. If the Vigilance Committee comes to your house to-night, jest tell 'em Thompson is already done for—was killed by some one a-shootin' from behind on your way home.'

"Blackman drew the frail form of the woman to him, kissed her, and disappeared in the darkness into the tall grass.

"The poor woman quietly placed her shawl over her dead husband's face, picked up the reins, and with eyes staringly fixed upon the mules, drove on.

* * * * *

"The neighbours gave it out that although Jack Thompson was undoubtedly 'stick,' he could not and did not elude the vigilance of the 'Committee,' whose unerring judgment could always be safely trusted to supplement a doubtful verdict; and so the credit of his passing was with many a sly and knowing wink appropriated by others."

* * * * *

"That's a good story," said the Q.C., as the reading finished, "but where did Creasy learn his American dialect from?"

No one seemed to know.

"There's an American nurse at the hospital," suggested the man who had read the story, "possibly she collaborated with him."

"Possibly," asserted the Q.C. "In that case the poor fellow's condition is hopeless." W. G. C.

ON THE BRINK.

One evening—I think it was the first night of the revival of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Lyceum—Jack Saloeny and his wife occupied a box there, which, after much difficulty, as he averred, Colonel Dunkirque, of the "Heavies," had been fortunate enough to secure. As a general rule, Colonel Dunkirque was not in the habit of presenting first-night boxes to his friends unless he had some object to gain. People suggested that it was a ruse on his part to win Jack's good graces—especially the smiles of Jack's wife; but, then, people might have lied—they frequently do in such matters—and yet for once they were right.

Dunkirque was as handsome a man as you would see anywhere—a man whose appearance was hailed with inward tribulation and groaning by poor beggars who had not the pluck to kick him out of their houses when his attentions grew too pronounced. It was rumoured, too, that his doings lately had been very shady—so shady that his friends (he had many friends) all predicted that he would speedily have to bolt from the impending clutches of those ministering fiends, Messrs. Shylock and Co.

Sibyl Saloeny was a very handsome woman—dangerously handsome. She had masses of golden hair, which did not owe its sunny tints to some vile wash; arched red lips, sweet blue eyes, a soft, white neck, and a complexion of dazzling fairness. In addition to these charms, she possessed a knack of pleasing people when she chose to take the trouble, and was also very popular in her own immediate circle. Jack had fallen in love with her in his usual impulsive, headlong manner; but, for my part, I always thought her a trifle hard and unsympathetic.

There was sometimes a look in her sweet eyes not entirely acquiescent when Jack had intimated something of which she disapproved. Having said what he wanted, Jack generally let her have her own way, and so the impending storm always blew over—for a time. She demanded absolute slavery from him, and accepted his devotion as a matter of course. Club friends, amusements, all had to give way to this little autocrat's imperious mandates; and poor Jack was spoilt for us.

Yet he was very happy. In her softer moments, prejudiced as I was, I could but admit the charm of her sweet, low voice, and the winning eyes which could have lured a babe from its mother's arms. But I often imagined that her thoughtlessness would one day bring her to grief. She had such a superb contempt for conventionalities. You and I, gentle reader, know better. We bow down to and worship Mrs. Grundy as if we liked her; but do we? I think not.

That evening things seemed to be approaching a climax—a particularly unpleasant one, too, for poor Jack. He did not notice what was going on. He loved his wife too dearly even to dream of suspecting her. It was a delightful experience to him to listen to the balcony scene, and to follow the hapless fortunes of the star-crossed lovers, although he could not help wishing that the Romeo would be a little less intellectual, and a trifle more impressive with the lovely Juliet. Practically, his wife and Dunkirque were alone—Jack told me all this long afterwards without attaching any importance to it, and I linked the fragments together.

Half an hour later I stepped in. Jack whispered to me not to speak, and I was greeted by Mrs. Saloeny with the usual polite indifference a wife reserves for her husband's friends. In short, it was not ten minutes before I had seen enough of the situation, and concluded to step outside for a lounge in the corridor. The glamour of the scene had failed to touch my jaded senses. I could not help seeing a grimy stage carpenter up in the flies, and this naturally did away with all illusion. What an awful bore if the man had dropped his old wideawake upon the passionate lovers.

The door opened (I was leaning against the next box); out came Mrs. Saloeny and Dunkirque; she shivering—in the hot atmosphere—and a trifle pale. Her eyes wore a frightened look; and—yes, she certainly did seem inclined to cry.

"We shall be just in time for the last train," she nervously whispered. "I told Jack that you should see me to my carriage, and he—he is going to his club."

"So much the better," said Dunkirque hurriedly. "We shall not be missed until we cross the Channel."

I hate scenes; but it was necessary to do something. A little fellow whom I had dandled on my knee, and loved like a son, must not be duped in this shameful way.

Dunkirque hurried past me, but I reached the staircase before Mrs. Saloeny reappeared, hooded and cloaked. Heaven knows I never acted so promptly before in my life; and yet I have been in one or two tight places.

When Colonel Dunkirque's carriage was called the coachman drove up with his fur tippet nearly over his ears. The night was cold, and Mrs. Saloeny trembled, half-turned for a moment, then stepped in. She had crossed the Rubicon—and was lost!

I wonder if she thought at that moment of the little hands that were folded before her night and morn, as the little sleepy eyes were raised to hers, and Jack's children lisped out their usual prayer: "God bless papa and mamma, and make us all dood. Amen!" I do not believe that she could have thought of them, or else she never would have been there.

"Viaduct Station!" called out the Colonel, flinging the fellow one of his few remaining half-crowns—it was the last desperate flight of the butterfly in the sunshine. Afterwards he would have time to repent or die in a gutter unshriven. In the madness of the moment he did not care which.

The horses dashed forward into the darkness, pulling well up to their collars, but—they did not go to the Viaduct Station!

Half an hour later, when they drew up, the Colonel jumped out to assist Mrs. Saloeny to alight. She was trembling still, and half inclined to return. Already the dark shadows of the weary years to come were lengthened out before her. And the man whose love she was about to betray! Well, it was now too late to recede. She was sorry—most women are—when they are found out.

"Sold!" hissed the Colonel, in his rage kicking a poor crossing-sweeper who had rushed up to open the carriage door.

"I wos only a-openin' the door," whined the old mendicant.

"Confound you!" foamed the Colonel, "you're always opening doors when you're not wanted. What the dickens is the meaning of this? But it is not too late."

"Not so fast, Dunkirque," I said, swinging down from the box, the fur tippet still upon my shoulders. "Wait a minute, Mrs. Saloeny"—for the benefit of the servants—"I have won my wager. The Colonel betted I would never drive him anywhere without his knowing it. Let me take you into the house."

Mrs. Saloeny took my arm, and I led her up the steps. She did not speak, but smiled strangely, and touched my hand.

Then I turned to Dunkirque.

"You are an infernal scoundrel!" I said, taking him on one side. "If you choose to make a scene I'll knock you down, old as I am. No; I shall not give you satisfaction. Before you are off let me warn you to beware of Scotland Yard. That bill of Lavington's has been placed in their hands, and the forgery traced to you."

This time he really went to the Viaduct Station, caught the last train, and was seen no more.

Then I returned to the house.

"You have acted like—a—hero," sobbed Mrs. Saloeny. "I can never repay you."

There stood Jack smiling in the doorway. She did not see him. He must never know.

"It was only a trifling service, and one which I was only too happy to render," I said, bowing low. "You over-rate it. A drunken servant is always dangerous."

"You have—saved—my—honour," she was beginning.

"Hush!" I whispered. "Jack must never know." Then aloud: "You are hysterical. Let me ring for your maid."

Between us we got her out of the room.

"What is it all about, old fellow?" asked the irreverent Jack, when Mrs. Saloeny had been safely disposed of in her room.

"Jarvis—drunk—again—as usual," I murmured laconically. (The lie cost me five hundred pounds and a free passage to the colonies for the irreproachable Jarvis and his family; but it was not a dear price to pay for the happiness of one's dearest friend.) "I've discharged the brute for you."

"All right," said easy-going Jack. "I'll get another."

And poor Jarvis was discharged.

I do not think that Mrs. Saloeny slept much that night. Jack told me that she cried a good deal.

"She seems to think that she has had a narrow escape, old fellow," Jack said unsuspiciously.

"Yes," I answered, "very."

But he never knew how narrow.

RICHARD SIBERT.

The Five Blue Spots.

Day after day, and night after night, did I brood over the great discovery which I thought was about to be opened up to me. I had long had a belief in the progressive development of creation; I believed that it was still possible to find the spec—the germ from which I could raise up a perfectly organised living being. I felt a new and strange pleasure in believing that the mystery of creation was now solved—that from the first inorganic atom which had received the force of life all other created beings had slowly, gradually, regularly advanced up to the period in which I lived.

The power of creation—the secret of life—was my god. My belief was that the force of life might be given to this inorganic atom. My laboratory was perfectly furnished; my days were spent there, and often entire nights. My mind was absorbed in the great truth I was bringing to light.

The confined air of my laboratory at length affected my health; a change was absolutely necessary. I struggled against the idea of removing for some time, and often left my little wife with tears standing in her deep blue eyes, after she had unsuccessfully implored me to leave London for a short time. Dear Annie! and yet I loved her! Heavens, to think that I—but I must proceed with my story as it occurred.

We went to the North of Northumberland to stay with an old college friend, who had frequently asked us to come on previous occasions. We were received warmly, and as it was winter time, we had plenty of occupation.

A few brisk runs with the county foxhounds almost made me forget my laboratory. The weather at length changed; first to a severe frost with snow, and then to a complete thaw. The dismal north-east wind shrieked through the leafless trees, and drove torrents of sleet splashing against the old-fashioned windows.

Tiring of hoping, and weary of grumbling, I was driven to take refuge in my friend's library. After a long search for something interesting, I came upon a little brown volume bound with two dingy, metal clasps. On opening its dark and discoloured pages, I found it was written in French manuscript. A hurried glance showed me that the work was on alchemy, a translation from the Arabic. All my former hopes returned in an instant. I pored over the pages of my newly-obtained treasure till late in the evening, heedless of the impatience of my friends, who, after doing everything to entice me away, left me to my book and self.

* * * * *

The secret, then, was now mine; here, in this old, neglected book, I had found a groundwork for my exertions. All the truths I had collected, all the experiments I had made, bore me out. I saw what had prevented others in ancient times from carrying out their designs. They knew not the life-giving power; the wonders of electricity had not then been discovered.

Vaguely hinted at and darkly guessed at in their works, I saw them groping their way in mist and uncertainty; but I—I was surrounded by the light of science. Wonderful, mysterious truths broke in upon my mind. My whole method and plan of operations stood out clearly before me. A restless force urged me to commence my scheme instantly. I must leave for London that very night.

I found my wife and friends retiring to rest. I told them my intention of starting for town immediately. Remonstrance and entreaty were of no avail, and in less than an hour I was seated in the train on the way to London. The train seemed to drag slowly through the darkness, but about noon next day I arrived at my house.

Without rest I commenced my operations; late at night I had nearly completed them, and, worn out in body and mind, I threw myself on the floor to sleep, lulled by the subdued sound of my furnace, which moaned and muttered like an unhappy spirit.

Early in the morning, after a feverish sleep, I rose, tired and unrefreshed, and began to complete the last portion of my arrangements. This was to prepare the liquid from which the beings to whom I had to impart life were to spring. On account of the experiments made in my late studies, I had all the ingredients ready in my laboratory. I poured the mixture then carefully into a large silver trough. The liquid was perfectly limpid, and of a beautiful blue colour, probably on account of a salt of copper entering largely into its composition.

And now I prepared my batteries, and soon afterwards the electric agent was applied. To my astonishment, no decomposition took place; the liquid remained clear and beautifully blue. Thus it remained for some hours. I hung over it in breathless expectation; the only change apparently being that the colour seemed deeper and purer.

Night came on, and the electric fluid still quietly streamed into the liquid. By accident, in adjusting one of the wires, I dashed a few drops from the trough on to the floor. There was a hissing sound as they fell, and as they touched the ground they burst into flame. This I extinguished, and then applied myself to observing closely the contents of the vessel, for I knew that a great change had taken place in their constitution. I removed the light to a distance, fearing lest it should ignite the vapours which were now rising from the surface. On returning in the dark I found strange flashes of light circling in the interior of the fluid; these gradually became brighter till I was enabled to see every object in the room clearly by their radiance.

Subtle fumes were also rising from the surface. On inhaling these fumes at first I felt faint, but the sensation passed away. The perfume now was delicious—it was heavenly; I drank it in like nectar. I gazed upon the coruscating surface, and a delicious ecstasy seemed to pervade the whole being; delicious streams of music fell softly on my ears, and shadowy forms of ineffable beauty floated in the air around me. Suddenly an insane desire took possession of me; I longed to seize the silver vessel and quaff the deep blue poison. I stretched out my hand with a cry of joy—and then——

* * * * * *

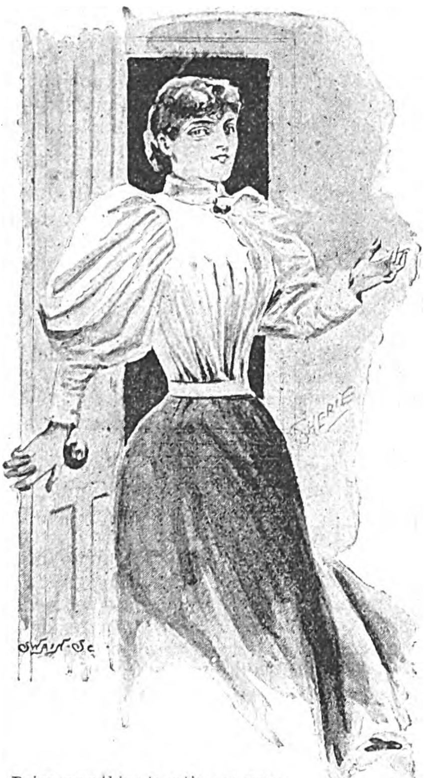
I recovered at last from a fever which had kept me insensible for a week. It was some days before I could get any explanation of how I came to be in my bedroom with my little wife attending to my every want, her gentle hands ever busy, and her eyes beaming with love and tenderness.

Gradually the details of my late occupation dawned upon my memory. I imagined I perceived the subtle odour diffusing itself through the chamber, and shuddered as I lay back on my pillow. A feeling of remorse came over me when I thought of my design. I felt as if I had intruded where man should fear to tread, and I felt a gratification in thinking that my designs had been frustrated.

One morning, when the doctor said that I was able to bear the news, I was told that one of the domestics, hearing a scream on that fearful night, had forced open the door of the laboratory. A strange, overpowering perfume, he said, at first drove him back, but rushing in a second time he found me lying insensible on the floor.

With breathless eagerness I asked if any of the apparatus had been touched? No, nothing had been moved. The windows had been opened to allow the poisonous vapours to disperse, the doors had been then locked and had never been opened since. A weight seemed lifted from my mind. I would instantly go down and destroy all that remained of my strange experiment.

I was still too weak; three or four days passed over, and then I was able to go downstairs. With trembling hands and beating heart (why, I could not tell) I turned the key and entered the laboratory, alone. Everything remained as I had left it a fortnight before.



Doing everything to entice me away.

There stood the ponderous batteries, long since worked out; there loosely hung the copper connecting wires, covered with green rust. The silver trough was tarnished and dim, but everything stood as I had left it.

The interior of the trough was coated with metallic copper, while the solution had almost entirely evaporated; there was still a small quantity of liquid at the bottom, covered with a thick, opal-tinted mould.

On looking closely at this mould-covered residue, I noticed a peculiar irregularity, or five little heaps or hillocks in regular arrangement—one at each angle of a square, and one in the centre—exactly like *the five-side of a gaming die.* These heaps were of such equal size and uniform shape that I could not attribute their presence to chance. I supposed that electricity had so acted upon the particles of the solution as to make them take up their present position.

I examined the mould under the microscope, and found it to be a fungus of a peculiar kind; but, in removing some more of the mould with a glass rod, I happened to touch one of the little heaps, and found under it a small blue crystal of cubic form, and under each of the other three angular hillocks I found a similar crystal.

On removing the mould from the centre hillock I found what, at first, I thought was a circular mass of the same crystalline substance, but imagine my surprise and horror when I saw the mass begin to struggle in the liquid, and, clearing away the silky needles of the mould, disclose to my view a large scarabæus of perfect shape, and of a deep blue colour.

A feeling of terror filled my mind. Whence had come this strange creature? Whence came the power with which he stretched out his antennæ, drew the blue case covers from his back, and cleared the mould from his filmy wings? Could this be the result of my researches—my days of toil, my nights of unrest? *A beetle!* I strove to laugh, but the attempt failed, and my heart sank within me with a strange foreboding. At this moment, from the interior of the trough, a peculiar sound arose, like the rapid ticking of a clock, although louder, and with a metallic tinkle in it. It was the same sound as that produced by the "death-tick" beetle.

As soon as the sound died away, I looked once more at the creature; he was half in and half out of the liquid, and evidently as yet unable to fly. The prominent desire in my mind was to destroy the insect, for his unearthly sounds and the strange flashing of his bead-like eyes made me tremble with a vague terror. However, I overcame the feeling, and determined to let him live for a few days.

Early next morning I visited the laboratory, but, on looking into the silver vessel, I was unable to detect any traces of the scarabæus. Puzzled and annoyed, I began to inspect the room, when I suddenly heard the ominous "death-tick," and after a few preliminary flights round the room, the beetle alighted upon the rim of the trough. A ray of sunlight glancing in fell upon him; his colour was exquisite—a rich, deep cærulean blue; he seemed a living sapphire, and would have been beautiful but for his loathsome form.

I had brought a piece of sugar with me, which I thought might please the taste of my new favourite. I placed it on the bench near; he flew directly towards it, and settled upon it, but, as if dissatisfied, a moment afterwards he flew back towards the rim of the trough. I heard a low whine at my feet, and, looking down, saw my wife's little dog, "Lalette." I threw the rejected sugar towards her, and soon heard her crunching it up in her jaws. Shortly afterwards I left the room, and as I closed the door louder than ever I heard the sound of the "death-tick."

I was engaged out of doors during the day, and in the evening my wife's first question was whether I had seen "Lalette" that day? I then remembered that she had been in the laboratory with me in the morning, and, fancying that she must be locked in, I went to the door and, opening it, called her by name. There was no movement or response; but, as I called again, something whirred past me in the air and dashed into the hall. I felt certain that my beetle had escaped. Shutting the door hastily, I rushed back for a light. On re-entering the laboratory, I could neither see nor hear anything of the beetle; but in the middle of the floor, exactly where I had left her in the morning, poor "Lalette" was lying dead.

Some portions of the sugar were still lying beside her—she had been poisoned. Once more I sought diligently for the beetle, but no trace was to be found. "Lalette" was a great favourite, and my poor wife was inconsolable. I told her the dog must have picked up some poison in my room, and with promises of a new canine favourite soon her grief calmed down.

All that night an indefinable horror took possession of me. When I thought of that living sapphire being at large in the house, a firm belief possessed me that "Lalette" had been killed by that poisonous insect. All that night he haunted my dreams; several times I started from slumber, thinking I heard that unearthly death-tick. I determined in my feverish sleeplessness to search every nook and corner of the house on the morrow. Somehow I felt at times that my existence, my destiny, was bound up in the life of this hideous insect.

Reproaches seemed spoken to me, in one dream of that long night, that I had created a living poison, and sent it out into the world. I shuddered and awoke. The words seemed burnt upon my brain. Could I ever forget them? Listen!

Next morning I heard that one of the domestics, a young, pretty girl of nineteen years, was ill. Three days after she died. The doctors said it was heart disease. One of them, a sententious old quack, said the only peculiarity of the case was a strange mark upon the girl's breast. A pang went through my whole frame. A mark. What mark? What was it like? By a mysterious perception I knew that this mark concerned me. But how? I soon knew. On the cold white breast of the corpse were *five blue spots*, arranged like the spots on *the five side of a die!*

Controlling my emotion as best I could, I locked myself in my room, and burying my face in my hands, cried in agony: "Accursed beast! this is thy work; the blood of an innocent being is on my hands." My brain seemed whirling round, and every attempt to collect my thoughts was in vain. The infernal creature—my creature!—had murdered this young girl, and how knew I where he would stop?

Every corner of the servants' room I searched, but no trace of the fiendish beast was there. After some time spent in this vain search, I left the room and joined my wife and friends below. They were shocked at my appearance. I sat apart, moody and silent. A heavy cloud of presentiment overpowered me, and I felt that my cup was not yet full, but that, when full, I should have to drink it to its bitter dregs. We separated to retire to rest; but though few of us expected to find it, no sooner had I laid my head on the pillow than I fell asleep—a dull, heavy sleep, as dreamless and almost as breathless as that of the corpse in the next chamber. I do not know how long I slept, but I awoke suddenly with an undefinable feeling of terror.

How dark the room is getting! Put your ear close to my mouth; I feel faint with speaking loud. But I must tell you all.

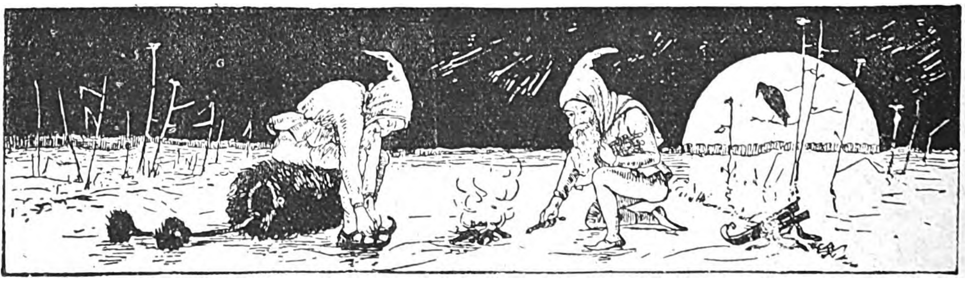
I awoke, and, seemingly, close to my ear, loud and distinct, I heard the death-tick. My hands clenched when I knew he was within my reach—close to my ear. "Heaven help me," I muttered, "if I do not crush the insect now!"

The moonbeams poured in through the window and filled the room with a mysterious light. The rays struck across the pillows of the bed, and fell softly on the upturned face of my wife. She slumbered peacefully, but on her snowy brow, glittering as blue as heaven itself, was the loathsome beetle. With one blow I struck him from her face, and then leapt from the bed. I saw his jewel-like form upon the ground; I seized it and crushed it in my hands. A fierce pain shot up my arm; my blood seemed changed to molten lead. The agony was excruciating. I dropped the vile abortion; he flew from me, and, dashing through the half-closed window, disappeared into the moonlight night.

My story is well-nigh told. You know—you know how my wife sickened and died. But, listen! you did not see the blue mark upon her brow.

How dark the room is, and how slowly my heart is beating! Look at this arm—here! Above the elbow there is the death-brand—*five blue spots arranged like the spots on a die!* I have but an hour to live. You know my secret. Let me rest.

D. SHAW.



A Waif from the Eternal City.

A BLOCK had occurred in one of the most crowded streets of Manchester. The carriage of the Chief Constable, with its well-matched bays, was forced to wait behind a brewer's dray till the confusion should have somewhat abated.

"Now, how long will this continue? We are late enough as it is."

The speaker's tone was that of a spoilt child, to whose pleasure all things are expected to give way, even the high pressure and the hurry of life of a great city. A beautiful woman was she, the pale spring sun rays—for it was early March—just striking the red gold lights in her warm brown hair as she sat there wrapped in dark Russian sables. She had a great bouquet of blue Parma violets in her hand; their subtle fragrance was flung abroad by the young spring breeze. Her eyes wandered to the other side of the street, and then they caught sight of something which gave her beauty-loving nature a throb of passionate delight.

"Paul, did you ever see such a face? It is faultless."

The petulant tones had a touch of rapture in them now. The Chief Constable adjusted his eye-glass, and followed the direction of his wife's eyes.

A boy stood on the pavement opposite, his basket filled with small plaster images. Such a face was his as Murillo loved to paint—a face with the beauty of dark eyes and the warm colouring of the sunny South.

"Call him across, Paul. I want to see him nearer."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear. Let us be going on now. The way is clear again."

"Paul!"

It is impossible to give the tone in which the name was spoken, half incredulous surprise, impatience, quick, intolerant anger—it was a mixture of all three.

The Chief Constable thought it wiser to obey. Pulling the checkstring, he beckoned to the boy. The lad came to the carriage door. Mrs. Bassett spoke to him in Italian. The soft, sonorous words came in a pretty English lisp from her lips: "Where do you come from?"

"Rome," he answered, and smiled up into her face, and then his eyes wandered to the violets she held in her hand. He gave a low cry, and stretched out his hands towards the blossoms with a gesture instinct with grace and longing.

She gave him some, and watched his face grow grave and sad as he held them close. Then she said:

"I should like to paint you—put you in one of my pictures. I will give you money—gold if you are good and still. Will you come to my house to-morrow?"

The boy's face flushed, his eyes were alight, his lips, scarlet as some bright blossom of his own land.

"To-morrow. Do not forget," said Mrs. Bassett to the boy, and she dropped the silver into his hand.

The carriage moved on.

For a moment the perfume of those violets, the flowers of his own dear land, was flung into the boy's face; then he stood alone upon the pavement, gazing after the swiftly-rolling carriage, with a little heap of silver and a cluster of Parma violets in his small brown hands.

* * * * *

"It is finished, Paul. Tell me what you think of it."

Mr. Bassett looked up from the papers he was studying as his wife came to his side with a square of canvas in her arms.

He regarded it silently for awhile through his eye-glass. Then he said, slowly: "It is a really wonderful likeness."

She passed her hand through his arm, and they stood together looking at the painting.

"It is very good," said Bassett again.

"Then it must indeed be so, for you are always sparing of your praise—always rather hard upon failure," she answered a little wistfully.

"Why should one fail? One ought to succeed in small as well as great things. But women never will so long as they work only from caprice."

It was true he had never yet failed in skill or energy or in clever administration since he had held the office of Chief Constable of Manchester, and he was not a little proud of the fact.

* * * * *

Autumn had passed away, and winter's cold, white pall was covering with icy impartiality the grimy streets of the city, when Manchester rang from end to end with one theme—the sudden, strange disappearance of the little Italian image-seller. The boy had become well known in the streets, through which, day after day, he wandered with his little store of plaster images.

When the news had spread through the force that Mrs. Bassett was painting his picture, the men had felt that he was somehow especially entitled to their protection, and many a friendly word had passed between them and the little soft-voiced lad—who was "as pretty as a girl," one said to another. Ladies, too—friends of Mrs. Bassett, who had seen the painting and pronounced it "too lovely"—stopped their carriages as he passed, and gave him bright smiles and brighter sixpences. And now, without word or warning, he had suddenly disappeared.

Every effort made by the police to discover his whereabouts was completely baffled. They more than suspected foul play. But this uncertainty as to the fate of the beautiful child was not long to remain.

One morning the Chief Constable was greatly disturbed by a report from one of his men that a "subject" purchased by some students bore a strange resemblance to the missing boy, and that, when the little body came to be examined, it was found that all the teeth had been extracted, probably from fear of identification on account of their unusual beauty.

These were the days of the "Resurrectionists." Burke and Hare, as yet undiscovered, were plying in secret their awful trade. But even already vague rumours had risen from time to time of graves rifled of their dead in the lonely watches of the night.

Mrs. Bassett was very much distressed. Full of generous and kindly impulse, she had concocted many a plan for her little *protégé's* future; had intended—when the picture should be finished—to rescue him from the streets, and place him somewhere in safe and kindly keeping. She urged her husband to leave no means untried of discovering his fate.

The Chief Constable, on his part, was both perplexed and annoyed by his repeated failures to run to earth the boy's murderers. Every effort was made by himself and his men to find some clue. The great probability was that the clothes the child had worn were destroyed; but the teeth, Mr. Bassett thought, being saleable, sooner or later might be traced. Failure in anything he had determined upon was trying to a man of Paul Bassett's turn of mind; but to fail in a matter like the present, with the eyes of all Manchester upon him, was peculiarly vexatious.

It preyed upon him to an extent so great that neither night nor day was he able to forget it. Like a thing of darkness, it haunted his sleeping and his waking hours.

And one night it came to pass that he dreamed a curious dream. He fancied he was riding along a lonely road in the dead of night. He knew the road well. It was one he often traversed in his waking hours. But when he came to a part where two roads met he thought he hesitated, and then, instead of turning to the right, as he was conscious even in his dream of usually doing, he took the left, an untrodden, gloomy lane, which led to a wide, lonely moor.

He rode on and on, and by-and-bye came to a solitary house on the edge of the desolate moor. It stood out against the dark background as clearly as a silhouette drawing in the moonlight. Suddenly—he knew not how—there was borne in upon him the conviction that the clue to the mystery of the Italian boy's death lay within that lonely house.

He drew rein and stopped. He felt a sensation of horror creep over him, which he tried to shake off, but it held him like a terrible nightmare. Suddenly the dream changed, and he found himself trying to enter. The door was fastened, but he burst it open. A sound of stealthy footsteps and whispered words was followed by death-like silence. Cold grey shadows filled the rooms, and a nameless terror dogged his footsteps. But, impelled by some all-powerful instinct, Paul Bassett went up the stairs, and entered a small room at the top—the only one that commanded a view of the back of the house. He saw before him a large garden, overhung by dark trees that cast weird shadows about it in the pale moonbeams.

Mr. Bassett, still having that strange sense of being under compulsion, descended the stairs, and found his way into the garden.

He was conscious of carefully searching beneath the trees, when suddenly his foot struck against a small lump of clay. Kneeling down, he felt with his hands under the long, dank grass, and found that the earth had been recently disturbed, and covered again by the coarse sods, and in an instant he knew, as if by a revelation, that what he was seeking lay below.

And just then the Chief Constable awoke. So vivid had been his dream, so strongly lay the impression of it upon him, that he started up with the fancy that he was still in that lonely garden. He lay down again, pondering over it a little perplexedly. It had seemed so real, so vivid, he could not at once shake off the impression it had left upon him; and by-and-bye he fell asleep again, and dreamed precisely the same dream in all its details. It was just as before; nothing was changed, from the time he was riding along the lonely lane till he stumbled over the little lump of clay, and saw that near where he stood the ground had been upturned, and then, as before, he awoke.

He was not by any means a superstitious man, but the clearness of the dream, and the fact of his having twice dreamed it, impressed him greatly. He awoke his wife and told her. No one likes to be aroused from sleep and told a horrible dream. The Chief Constable met with small sympathy from Mrs. Bassett, who told him to "hold his tongue and not frighten her to death."

He fell asleep, and again he dreamed the same dream, and awoke as he stood by the broken sod. He sprang from his bed and began hurriedly to dress.

"Really, Paul, I believe you are mad," said Mrs. Bassett sleepily. "What on earth are you about?"

But when he told her of his dreaming the third time the same strange dream, she entreated him not to go.

But he promised her to take four of his most experienced men with him, and she gave a reluctant consent—silently, except for the ring of their horses' hoofs upon the frost-bound earth, the chief constable and his men rode along, turning to the left as they reached the cross-roads, and down the long lane till the wide moor lay before them. And then Paul Bassett saw the house just as it had appeared to him in his dream. It stood aside on the edge of the desolate moor, silent as the grave, lonely as the place of death. Ivy covered thickly its grey walls, and tapped against the latticed panes in the rising wind like the touch of ghostly fingers. Pale, wan moonbeams fell aslant the garden, and sombre shadows gathered thickly under the trees. One of the men dismounted and knocked sharply.

"Open, in the King's name!"

The Chief Constable held the search-warrant in his hand as he sat motionless upon his horse, waiting. There was neither sound nor movement within. The constable knocked again loudly, and as he did so they distinctly heard stealthy footsteps and whispered words.

"Open, in the King's name!"

And the door was opened by a woman.

"Dismount," said the Chief Constable sharply, "and follow me," and he flung himself from the saddle. Instructing two of his men to watch that no one left the house, without another word he led the way to the place of his dream.

"Dig here, my men; you will find what we are seeking," he said quietly. And he looked on as one still in a dream, his breath coming thick and fast, his heart beating heavily, as his men slowly turned the loosened earth. Cautiously and in silence they dug, and their chief stood by with a pale, stern face. An exclamation from one of the men made him start. The spade had struck against something. They stooped, lowered their lanterns, and took out of the earth a small bundle. Yes, there were the worn jacket and little threadbare garments of the murdered boy, and as one of the men half tenderly lifted the poor little coat one or two pearly teeth fell from its folds. A savage murmur rose to the men's lips. "Poor little lad."

The Chief Constable's voice was husky.

"What is that?"

Sudden life and movement in the silent house and a sound of shots. Mr. Bassett gave his men some hurried, sharp directions. They dashed into the house only just in time; their comrades were engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with the murderers who were armed.

Needless to say that at their trial they pleaded guilty, in the face of such evidence as this strange discovery.

Needless also to say that that was the first and only time in his life that Paul Bassett, Chief Constable of Manchester, was ever aided by a dream in the discovery of a crime.

Annie Davis.

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The Queen of Night.

By HEADON HILL,

Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," "The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

Gaston Vizard gives to Sir Simon Crawshay an introduction to the agent of the vessel *Queen of Night*, in order that he may make special arrangements with regard to the trip of his wealthy ward, Miss Challenor. Dr. Zavertal calls on Vizard, and informs him that a new captain will be wanted before the next cruise.

The *Queen of Night*, under the guise of a popular pleasure boat, is used in reality by a set of unscrupulous adventurers for the purpose of doing away with objectionable relatives.

In Chapter I. Cyril Forrester receives his dismissal from the Flower Steamship Company for breaking regulations while saving the life of Miss Aline Challenor. He applies for and obtains from Nathan and Co., of Fenchurch Street, the vacant command of the ocean yacht *Queen of Night*.

Becoming engaged to Miss Challenor (who comes in for a quarter of a million on attaining her majority), he obtains an interview with Sir Simon Crawshay, who promptly refuses a consent to his engagement, and informs him that his ward will be out of his way for the next six weeks, as she is about to take a cruise on board the *Queen of Night!* On going aboard he is introduced to Dr. Zavertal, and meets among the passengers Miss Challenor, who is under the care of the doctor.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTOR'S FIRST PATIENT.

IT was not till noon on the day after leaving port, when we were well down Channel, at the back of the Isle of Wight, that I felt justified in handing over the care of the ship to the chief officer, and in quitting the bridge. The day was fine, and the sea as calm as a duck pond, so that nearly all the passengers were on deck enjoying the fresh salt air, and busily engaged in forming new friendships which should last through the cruise. Already there were signs that one or two promising flirtations had arisen. The weather had tempted the ladies to put on their brightest summer costumes, everyone had left their worries behind, and the scene was one of light laughter and brilliant colour.

I went first to my room to remove the traces of the long night watch, and change my clothes. Having made my toilet, I strolled aft, and soon found myself doing the civil to the best of my ability to the various groups under the awning, purposely abstaining from seeking Aline at first. It was no part of my plan to make her conspicuous, or to attract to her the gossip which takes root so easily on ship-board. Zavertal was there, apparently in his element—introducing, advising, amusing, all in a breath—and as soon as he noticed my presence I saw that he was making the most of it. The words, "the Captain," are magical ones at sea, and their owner is an object of interest to all his nominal subjects to a quite unmerited degree.

"The Captain—Captain Forrester," I heard the Doctor murmur in a deferential whisper, as I approached a bevy of smart folk congregated round an old gentleman seated in a deck chair, who seemed to be telling funny stories. Zavertal's announcement caused all eyes to be turned on me, and he proceeded aloud:

"Good morning, sir. You have had a long spell of work while the rest of us have been playing and sleeping, I am afraid."

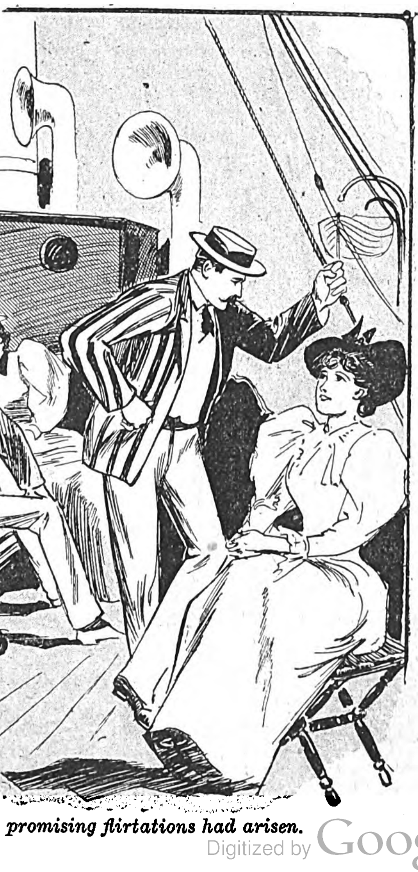
I returned his greeting, and, assuming the airs of a veteran skipper, I remarked that it was always my practice to take charge of the ship myself while in sight of land. Then I asked to be introduced to the other people around, and he pronounced a string of names, all immaterial to this story, though I got to be familiar enough with most of them in the next week or two. I do not know whether it was by intention, but Zavertal omitted to mention the old gentleman in the deck-chair, and he promptly put on an expression of comic resentment.

"Why should you pass me over, Doctor?" he protested with a distinct American accent. "I guess you think my yarns would keep the Captain from his duty, and that it would be safer for all parties if he didn't know me."

Zavertal looked at him, smiling with his lips; but, though the glance was not directed at me, and I could not therefore be certain, I fancied that the cold glint was in his eyes as he answered:

"I am quite sure, sir, it would be very much safer, if you always prove as amusing—to *me*, at any rate—as you have this morning, though that was not really the reason why I was so rude as to fail to introduce you to the Captain. The fact is I am sorry to have to confess that you are one of the very few passengers whose names I am not yet quite certain about."

Was it that there was a half-tone in Zavertal's voice that suggested to me some subtle meaning in his words, or was it only that instinct was beginning to teach me to look for such uncon-



One or two promising flirtations had arisen.

sciously? I cannot say truly even now, but I know that the thought crossed my mind and caused me to pay closer attention to him whom he addressed. The passenger in the deck-chair, as I have said, was old, his appearance being that of seventy at least, even allowing for a liberal discount due to his lively briskness of manner. I had come across the type many times before in many ships—the gay "old dog" of a passenger who prefers young society of both sexes, and attracts it to himself by a pleasing personality, and a fund of anecdote. This particular specimen had a rubicund face, shining like a setting sun, amid luxuriant masses of snow-white hair, his bright eyes twinkled humorously, and he was dressed, rather young for his age, in a well-cut suit of light dittos, surmounted by a white Panama straw hat.

If there was any hidden meaning in the Doctor's speech the snowy-haired passenger showed no sign of suspecting it. Raising his hat lightly, more especially to me, but so as to include the general company, he said:

"Emerson C. Waldo, sir, is my name—General Waldo, late of the United States Cavalry, on a Yurrup tour for the benefit of health and education. I reckon I've powerfully neglected both, sir, in my time, having mostly spent my life in fighting Indians on the plains."

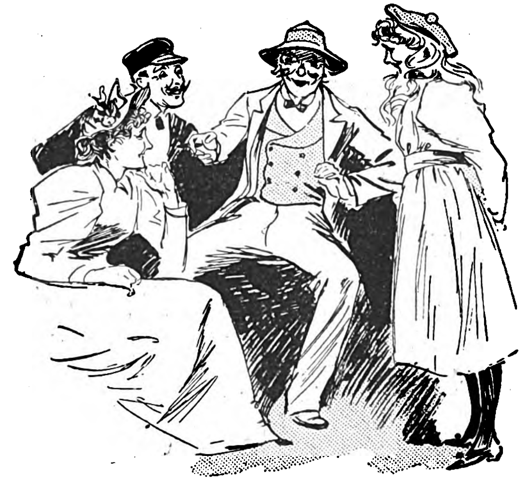
"Well, General," I said, "I hope that you will make up for lost time, and get all the arrears of enjoyment due to you on the *Queen of Night*. It's not in the contract, but we mean to give you fine weather, smooth seas, and, when we get down South, blue skies—if we can. We start fair anyhow."

I remained chatting a minute or two, and when I moved away Zavertal separated from the group and joined me in a promenade of the deck.

"You have been so occupied, sir, that I have got the start of you with the passengers," he said. "I may as well take the opportunity of posting you in what I have picked up. They are an average lot."

"Many invalids?" I asked, with a vivid remembrance of the bo'sun's reference to "sea-funerals," though my question seemed almost silly amid that scene of gaiety and robust health.

"A few, but not many serious cases. There, though you might not think it, is one of them," the Doctor replied, pointing to a happy-looking, chubby-faced boy of fourteen who was amusing some of the elders by skylarking on the lower rattlins. "That is the young Earl of Darranmore, who, if he ever attains his majority, will possess a rent-roll of forty thousand a year. I fear that the lad is doomed, though—heart complications." And Zavertal sighed sympathetically as we wheeled for another turn.



The gay "old dog" of a passenger.

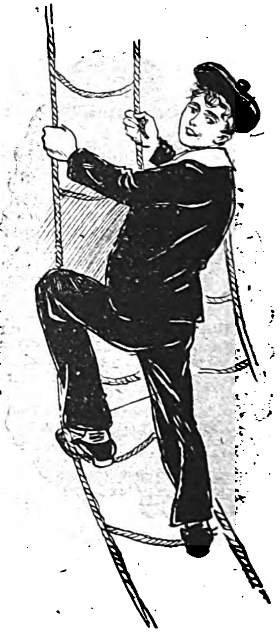
"That is hard lines," I said. "Are there any others about whom you are anxious?"

"There's a man called Desmond Orlebar, whom I doubt if we shall bring home again. He has gone the pace, and got himself into a generally played-out condition. There he is—sitting wrapped up on the other side of the deck, and indulging in his old games to the last, I see."

Following the direction of his glance, I saw a thin, sallow-faced man of forty, wearing a thick plaid ulster and propped up with pillows on a portable bamboo lounge. A steward had just brought him a mahogany-coloured brandy and soda, and Mr. Orlebar's efforts to take the glass from the tray into his shaking hands were painful to witness. There was no doubt about *this* passenger's illness.

"Poor beggar," I said. "And does that complete the list of dangerous cases?"

"Of the really dangerous ones, yes," replied Zavertal. "There are one or two other patients who come to me with bad reports from their relations or private medical attendants; but I see no reason to be apprehensive about any of them—except, perhaps, one."



A chubby-faced boy of fourteen.

"Who is that?" I asked, somewhat carelessly, I fear, as we reached the limit of our promenade at the stern. Facing about we both turned inwards to each other, so that as Zavertal answered my question his eyes for a moment dwelt on mine. Again they had that strange glint.

"She is a Miss Challenor," was the reply that so startled me that it would have been affectation on his part to have pretended not to notice its palpable effect. He hastened to add: "I rather fancy Nathan, before he went ashore, told me that you had met her."

"Yes, in a way I may be said to have saved her life," I replied, and, seeing no reason for further concealing a fact which was sure to get abroad in the ship, I briefly narrated the circumstances, only suppressing my present relations with Aline. "But surely," I concluded, "there must be some mistake about the state of Miss Challenor's health? I had a few words with her yesterday, and she laughed at the idea of there being anything the matter with her."

We turned again, and again I met the Doctor's gaze piercing me from out of a face that smiled with sad benevolence in every feature but the eyes. "The old story," he said sympathetically. "Everyone concedes the danger but the patient herself. I have not been called on to examine her yet, but her guardian wrote that it was an almost hopeless case of pulmonary phthisis. I presume her friends thought it unnecessary to frighten the poor girl by letting her know the nature and extent of her malady. However, as you take a very natural interest in her, I will observe closely, and let you know in a day or two. Excuse me, but I think I am wanted—and, Captain, if you will allow me to advise, you will turn in for a spell. Your night-watch has taken it out of you, and you look as if you needed rest."

Needed rest! As he left my side to go to someone who was beckoning to him, the sun seemed to be blotted out, and the voices and laughter around made a horrid blur in my ears like the "racing" of machinery when the main shaft breaks. To think that Aline—my sweet Aline, in the heyday of her youth and beauty, and in the height of our new-found happiness—was dying of consumption!

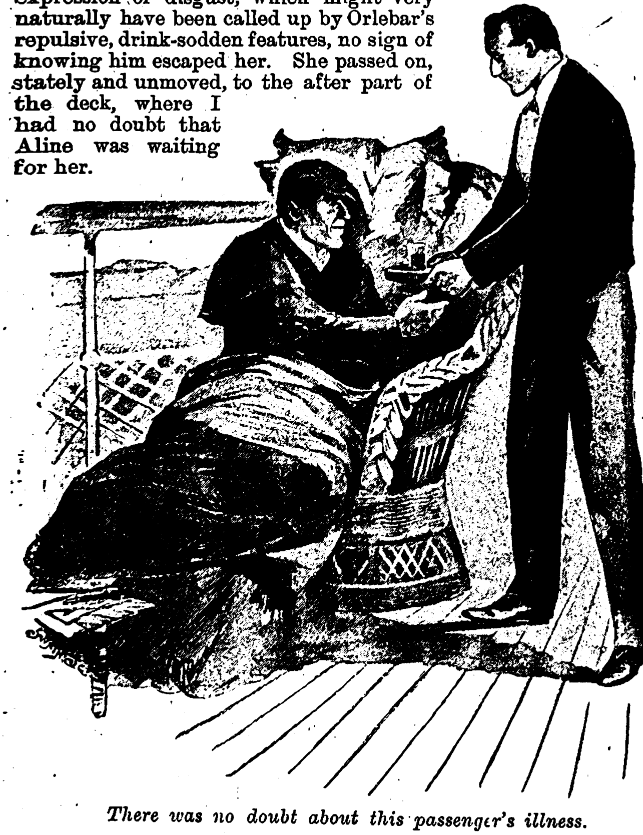
Then gradually the weight of sudden oppression was lifted, and, reaction setting in, I would not, could not, believe that the trouble existed at all. I recalled what Aline had said about the "wish being father to the thought" with Sir Simon, and I began to suspect that he had imagined what, probably from interested motives, he desired to become a reality. It was the first inkling of the truth, but how far short of it the events to be related must show.

The wind was light and steady from the East, and the glass high. We were clanking down Channel at an easy sixteen knots, with the massive front of the Main-bench cliffs glistening white in the sunlight five miles away on the starboard beam. There was nothing to keep me on deck, and having satisfactorily explained away the cause of my anxiety I decided to take Zavertal's advice and turn in till dinner time, leaving him to do the honours at the luncheon table.

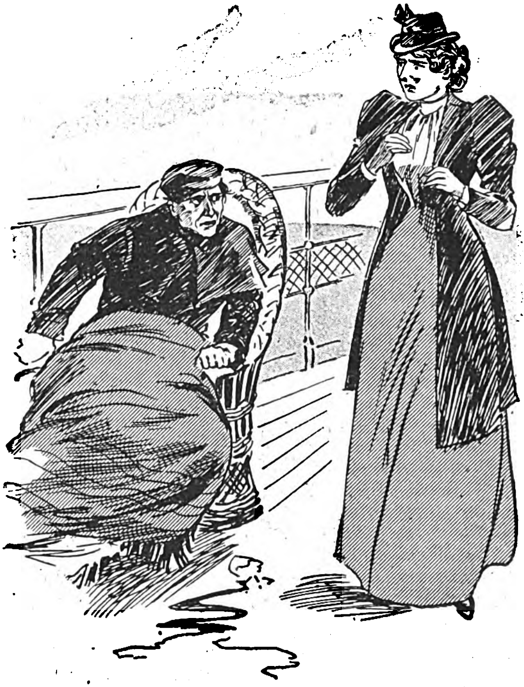
In going to my room I had to pass the spot where Mr. Orlebar's lounge was placed, and just as I was approaching it I met Aline's chaperon, as yet unknown to me, coming along the deck alone from the opposite direction. The sick man caught sight of her while I was within two feet of him, and the effect of her appearance upon him was as inexplicable as it was sudden. His shaking fingers dropped the now empty glass with a crash upon the deck, and I distinctly heard him murmur:

"Great Heaven, it's Ella!"

The recognition, if such it was to prove, did not appear to be mutual. Mrs. Brinkworth's attention was, of course, attracted by the falling glass, and she looked at the occupant of the lounge; but beyond a slight flush and a fleeting expression of disgust, which might very naturally have been called up by Orlebar's repulsive, drink-sodden features, no sign of knowing him escaped her. She passed on, stately and unmoved, to the after part of the deck, where I had no doubt that Aline was waiting for her.



There was no doubt about this passenger's illness.



"Great Heaven, it's Ella!"

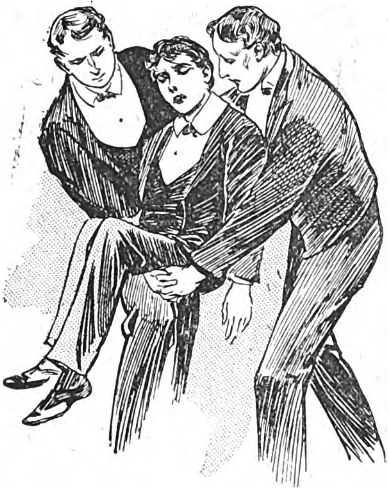
I had seen too many chance meetings on ship-board for the incident to make any impression on me, and I should have dismissed it altogether from my mind if one of the parties to it had not been so intimately connected with Aline. As it was I merely noted it mentally for future inquiry in the event of anything tending to show that Orlebar's presence on the ship would cause annoyance to a lady who had already won my dear girl's regard.

After a good sleep I awoke refreshed, and comforted with the reflection that after all, beyond specifying the nature of her imaginary illness, Zavertal had really said nothing more than Aline herself to confirm Sir Simon Crawshay's estimate of her health. The Doctor had not examined her chest, and his statement was based on nothing more substantial than a secondhand opinion which was probably all moonshine. I dressed therefore with every anticipation of a pleasant evening, and after a short visit to the bridge to see that all was right, I went down and mingled with the passengers, eventually making my way to where Aline was sitting with Mrs. Brinkworth.

I have the instinct common to most people of knowing a friend from an enemy at first sight, and something told me from that moment that the quiet, sad-faced woman was Aline's friend, and therefore mine. I think she had already guessed our secret, but if not she had every opportunity of doing so in the cheery half-hour we three spent together before the first gong sounded for dinner. We lovers were too confident in the future and in the freedom which Aline's majority would bring her in a few months, to affect more reserve than etiquette demanded in public. The shy and sentimental stage of courtship had been got over in the old *Dahlia*, and there was a very frank understanding between us.

When I sat down presently to preside for the first time in the saloon, I found that I had General Waldo for my left-hand neighbour, and on the other side an ancient dowager—Lady Carberry—who took the place of honour by right of her title. Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth were seated at my table, but some way down, and too far off for sustained conversation with them.

Parallel with mine was another table, at the head of which Doctor Zavertal presided, with the little Earl of Darranmore and the latter's tutor on one hand, and a financial magnate and his wife on the other. Mr. Desmond Orlebar was also placed at the Doctor's table, but some half-dozen seats away. The "captain's table," of course, accommodated those who were, or considered themselves, the *élite* of the ship, and it was not till I found myself at the head of the brilliant assemblage, and the most deferred-to personage in it, that I appreciated Nathan's compliment in selecting me for the job.



Lifted the young Earl's limp form.

Dinner proceeded gaily, and I worked hard to make up for lost time in cultivating friendly relations with the passengers. General Waldo kept our end of the table in a constant roar of laughter with comic descriptions of Western life, at which even the starchy old lady on my right had to unbend, and by the time dessert was reached I concluded that the social part of my duty was easier than I had expected. Things were going equally smoothly at the other table, where, with his quips and cranks, the young Earl was evidently establishing himself a general favourite. The interest in the merry youngster even spread to our table, his boyish laughter at Zavertal's good-humoured sallies causing many heads to be turned to look at him. General Waldo, who could see him as he sat, seemed to watch him unceasingly with the sympathetic attention due to a kindred spirit.

Suddenly, as the ladies were beginning to leave the saloon, Waldo plucked me by the sleeve, and exclaimed:

"Thunder, Captain! The swell of the ocean ought to be kinder to the swell *on* the ocean. What's up with our young aristocrat yonder?"

I thought at first that the veteran was merely cracking one of his copious wheezes, but I looked round to the head of the other table, and sure enough there was the Earl of Darranmore leaning back in his chair and gone deathly white, while Zavertal had risen and was deftly unbuttoning the boy's collar with one hand and feeling his pulse with the other. The night was dead calm, and save for the slight tremor caused by the pulsing of the engines the ship was as steady as a church. Waldo's suggestion of sea-sickness seemed, therefore, wide of the mark, and I recollected what the Doctor had said of the lad's weak heart in the morning.

At Zavertal's bidding a couple of assistant stewards lifted the young Earl's limp form and bore it away to his state-room, the Doctor himself following, but pausing as he passed out to say to me:

"It is only a faint. He will be all right to-morrow, but I fear this confirms the report I had of him—poor little chap!" And Zavertal hurried away tapping his broad waistcoat in the region of the heart, and repeating again: "Poor little chap."

The tables were already pretty well thinned, and in a couple of minutes the incident was forgotten by such as remained, Waldo resuming the thread of a yarn, in which he had been interrupted, about a Texan horse-thief, scoring all his points, bringing the story to a close, and thoroughly enjoying the applause that greeted the climax. For a moment or two, he sat as though meditating a fresh narrative, then suddenly jumped up and exclaimed:

"Pineapple, by Jove. I guess I'm a whale on pineapple," and before I could tell him that the steward should bring him some, he had crossed over to the now vacant table where Lord Darranmore had been sitting, and had seized a dish of the fruit that was there, coming back with it to his own place.

As he resumed his seat he looked at me. For the fraction of a second all the babbling fun in his face changed to stern scrutiny, and in that brief, steadfast gaze, remembrance came to me of someone quite different whom I had seen before—of Kennard, the American visitor to Nathan's office, who had forfeited his passage. The likeness was one of expression only, and was gone like a flash, as with one of his jokes Waldo set to upon the pineapple with a relish that justified his eagerness to secure it.

CHAPTER VII.

The Stowaway.

The next morning everyone was glad to hear that Zavertal's prediction had been verified, and that Lord Darranmore was not much the worse for his faint at the dinner-table. It got to be generally known about the ship that the boy's heart was affected, and when he came on deck during the morning, looking pale and seedy, he became the victim of a universal sympathy which didn't best please him.

"It's all rot," was his indignant reply when I met him and remarked that he would have to "go easy" and take care of himself. "There's nothing the matter with me—at least I never had anything the matter before. I expect I had too much of that meringue cream."

The weather continued fine and sunny, with just enough breeze to revive the jaded among the passengers without making them uncomfortable. Being now clear of the Channel, my presence on the bridge was seldom required, and I contrived to have several delightful chats with Aline, Mrs. Brinkworth discreetly making opportunities for a portion of them to be *tête-à-tête*.

At the same time I did not allow my love-affair to obscure my duties to the other passengers, and I worked hard to add to the general yacht-like life on board. All sorts of amusements in the musical and theatrical line were being projected, the Doctor showing untiring energy in discovering amateur talent where it might least have been expected. He even laid an embargo on General Waldo to give a character recitation from Rip Van Winkle at a variety entertainment that he was planning for the succeeding night. The Yankee veteran was discussing Zavertal's enterprise in a constitutional we took together before tiffin.

"Wonderful pushing fellow this Doctor of yours, Captain," he said, as we paced the deck. "You and he are just cut out for running a marine hydropathic show like this. He's an old partner of yours, I reckon."

"On the contrary; I've only known him a week," I replied. "This is my first voyage in the *Queen*, you must remember."

"Ah, but friend Zavertal hasn't always been at this game, I opine," returned Waldo, with an impatient gesture and one of his quizzical glances. "You can bet he qualified in a wider school than this. I guessed you might have pulled together previously."

"No, General," I said, wondering a little at his persistence after my first denial. "The Doctor and I are quite new acquaintances, though I must say that I hope we shall one day be old ones. He is a pleasant companion to sail with, and about the best man for the berth of ship's surgeon I ever came across."

"A responsible position—that of ship's doctor," remarked Waldo, more thoughtfully than as yet I had heard him speak. "It entails the powers of life and death—the perfectly unchecked power of life and death."

On the top of this conversation I was rather amused when Zavertal on the same afternoon took an opportunity of mentioning Waldo to me from much the same point of view.

"Fine specimen of the globe-trotting American, that neighbour of yours at the saloon table," he said. "You and he seem to hit it off together uncommonly well, sir."

"Oh, he is all right, up to date," I replied. "Perhaps one might get bored in time with his everlasting yarns of Western life."

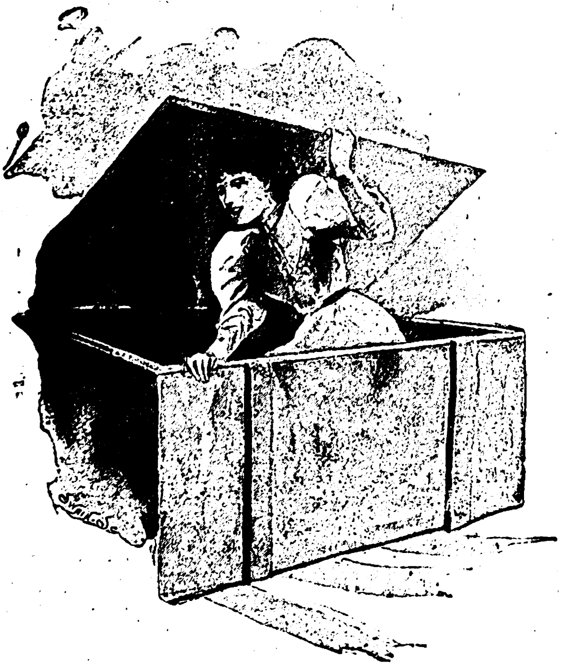
"I thought you might have met him before—you seemed so friendly," Zavertal said, in the careless tone of one who really wants to know.

"No, I never saw the General before on sea or land," I said. "He is not the sort of man one would forget either, seeing that he has a peculiarity. He strikes me as being a little more "twangy" than most Americans of his class nowadays."

"You are right," replied the Doctor, "and it is bound to be genuine. That is about the only thing an American wouldn't exaggerate purposely."

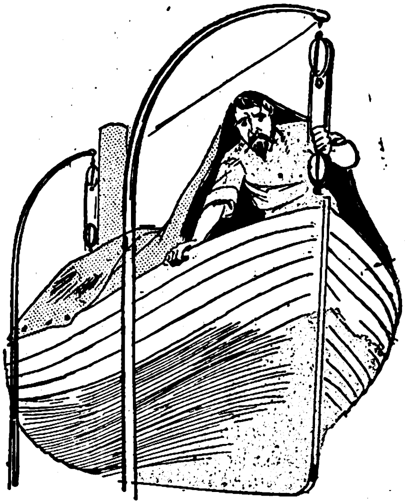
I had got pretty intimate with Zavertal during the four or five days we spent together before the ship sailed. I had told him of the American, Kennard, who had called at Nathan's office while I was waiting to be engaged, and I had since discussed with him his strange forfeiture of his passage, Zavertal remarking playfully that perhaps the gentleman with the pistol had met him again and had not been so forbearing. I was now on the point of mentioning casually how for half a second on the previous night Waldo's expression had reminded me of the absent passenger, when someone hailed me from the bridge and the subject dropped.

A little later on the afternoon of the third day out, Zavertal proposed a game of "hide-and-seek," and was soon surrounded by a number of younger passengers eager to join. Several of them hid in turn, and were found in more or less probable hiding-places—under the companion-stairs, and behind the piano in the music-room, while one adventurous maiden gave a longer chase than usual by stowing herself in the flag-locker behind the aft wheel-house. Then it was Lord Darranmore's turn to hide, and the searchers all retired to the dome, over the saloon stairs, while he concealed himself.



By stowing herself in the flag-locker.

Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth, in common with a number of other non-players, were sitting under the awning, watching the game, when it chanced on to the upper deck, and chatting to myself and to General Waldo, who by this time was on speaking terms with every living soul on the ship. Thus we four were together when Lord Darranmore came out of the deck-house to hide. The best places on the upper deck having already been exhausted by other players, the ladies expressed the opinion that he would have to go below if he was to show good sport.



A woebegone figure.

"With due submission, I guess not," remarked Waldo. "The young 'un has got a best bower to play, to judge by his manœuvres."

It seemed to me that the General was right. The boy did not hesitate for an instant, as if doubtful of where to go, but turned and went forward on the port side till he came nearly abreast of the Doctor's cabin, opposite which our steam launch was slung. The davits supporting it were turned inwards over the deck to prevent any risk of losing the launch in heavy weather, so that it was accessible without danger of falling overboard. It was covered with a tarpaulin, and to reach it it would be necessary to swarm up the davit, but these difficulties were evidently not going to deter an agile Eton boy from availing himself of a hiding-place so likely to be overlooked. Zavertal was standing in the door of the companion-way ready to give the word to the searchers, and he smiled and winked at us as the young Earl began to shin up the davit hand-over-hand.

Darranmore soon got a grip on the bulwarks of the launch, and we watched him raise the edge of the tarpaulin, duck his head beneath it, and slowly wriggle out of sight. As soon as he had disappeared, Zavertal gave the word to the seekers, and they came trooping out of the companion-way to commence the search. The quest had hardly begun in earnest when Lord Darranmore's head reappeared from under the tarpaulin, and it was seen that his face wore a comic expression of alarm or excitement.

"I say, this game's off," he cried out, clambering out of the launch. "There's a chap hiding in there already."

"Nonsense," said Zavertal, going up to him as he reached the deck. "You must be mistaken, Lord Darranmore. There can't be anyone there."

"I tell you I am not mistaken," retorted the lad hotly. "There's a man lying huddled up in the bows. I heard him breathing first, and then I put my hand out and felt him."

"We'll soon settle it," I said, joining the group with Waldo and a number of other passengers. "Here, Smith," I added to a quartermaster who was passing, "just take a look under that tarpaulin and see if you can catch a stowaway."

But before the order could be executed, the boy's statement was verified in a different way. The tarpaulin over the bows of the launch was raised, and a head covered with touzled black hair appeared, presenting such a woebegone figure that some of the passengers laughed. The apparition looked like a foreigner, and certainly did not belong to the ship. As for myself, I felt considerable annoyance, for a stowaway was a pest against which I had taken no precautions, it not occurring to me that anyone would try to sneak a passage on a ship not known as a regular "liner."

"Come down out of that," I said. "We will see if we can't find you better quarters in the hold, with a brace of anklets to steady you."

But the threat fell flat. "No spik Ingleese. Angry," moaned the stowaway.

"Poor fellow, he means that he is hungry. Don't be hard on him," pleaded Aline, who had come up with the rest, and to that sweet intervention the stranger owed the treatment that was meted out to him. By signs he was at length induced to leave the launch, and on reaching the deck he stood revealed as a tall, finely-built fellow, with features that, despite their extreme swarthiness, were by no means ill-looking. Zavertal, who was a master of many languages, tried him with several, and at last pronounced him to be a Spaniard, and a ship's steward by calling, who, failing to find a berth on a ship going to Spain, had taken this way of getting home.

"Very well," I said, "we will allow him to work his way; but he shall not get off too easy. He must go the round trip with us, and we will leave him at Gibraltar or Lisbon on the homeward voyage. Off with him forward, and give him some food."

My verdict having been translated to him, he was taken in charge by the quartermaster, bowing and scraping his thanks. The excitement lasted the passengers the rest of the afternoon, Lord Darranmore creating much amusement by taking all the credit of the capture. I heard Waldo drawing him on the subject of his discovery.

"I guess you were never smart enough to think of the launch to hide in yourself?" said the General.

"Well, not quite," admitted the boy reluctantly.

"And who might have been responsible for that bright idea?" asked the old gentleman.

"It was the Doctor who put me up to it," said Darranmore.

Waldo did not pursue the matter further, but walked away with a queer shrug of his shoulders.

That night at dinner the swarthy Spaniard, washed and brushed up, took his place among the assistant stewards who waited at Zavertal's table.

(To be continued.)

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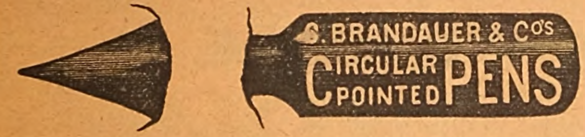

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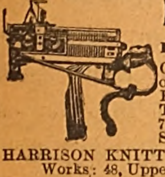

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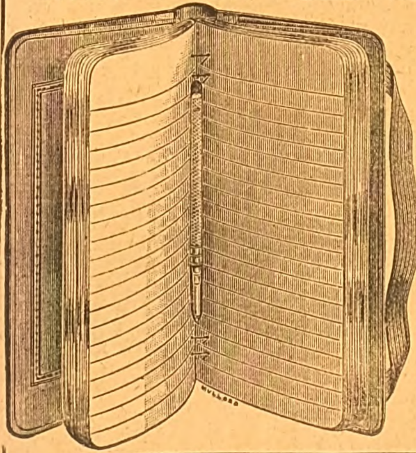

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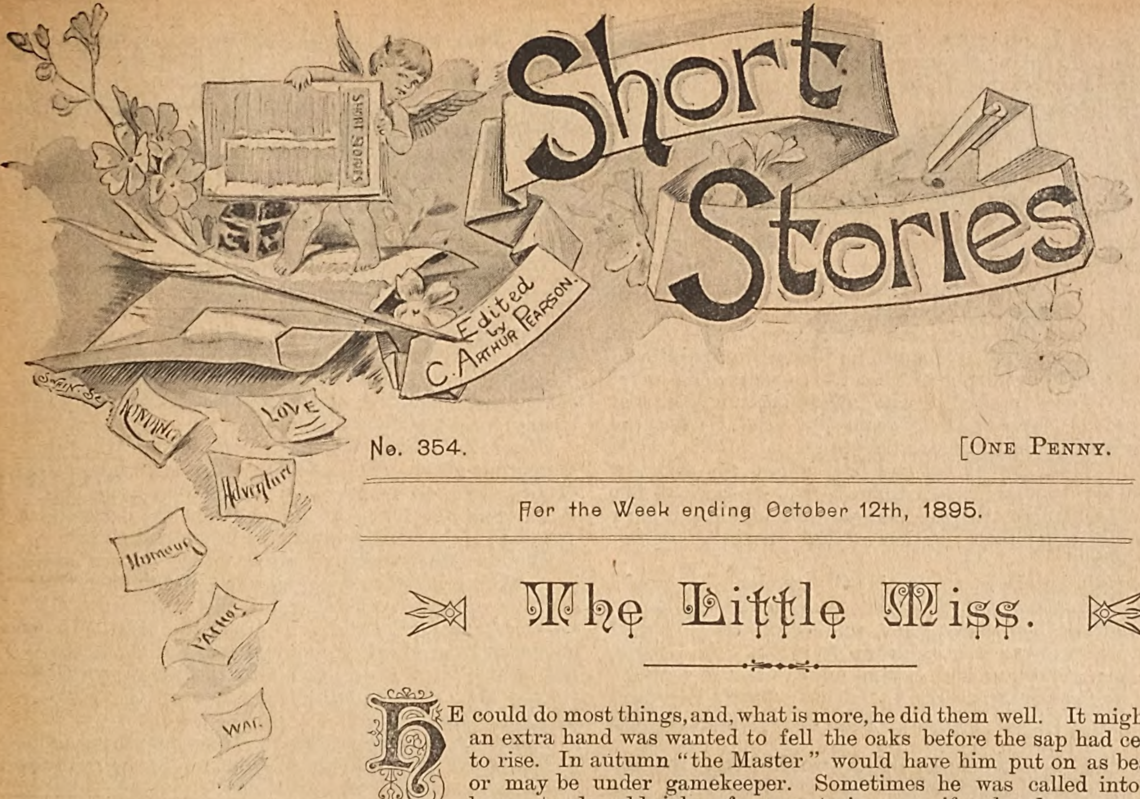

Short Stories
Edited by C. Arthur Pearson.

No. 354. [One Penny.

For the Week ending October 12th, 1895.

The Little Miss.

He could do most things, and, what is more, he did them well. It might be an extra hand was wanted to fell the oaks before the sap had ceased to rise. In autumn "the Master" would have him put on as beater, or may be under gamekeeper. Sometimes he was called into the house to do odd jobs of carpentering; or, if a hand were wanted in the stable, it was Gilroy who filled the vacancy.

Possibly it was his militia training that made him even wheel a barrow differently from the other men; anyway, he had always been a favourite with "the Master," and when "the little Miss" came to live at the house it seemed only natural that Gilroy should be deputed to teach her to ride, and fire straight, to throw a fly, and manage a boat.

"If she ain't a boy, she shall have the same chances," the old man would say, "and," he would add, "she will make none the worse woman for that."

Seated on his cob, he watched her learn to ride and jump in the ten-acre meadow; or listened from the bank to the even voice of Gilroy reiterating: "Wrists back, keep the elbows in, lean well back," as he taught her to scull on the lake.

It was Gilroy who taught her the names of flies and the mysterious lore of fishing, how to tell a bird by its flight, and showed her where to find their nests. It was to Gilroy she confided her distaste for lessons, and her distaste at the arrangement of Providence in having destined her to be a girl. And Gilroy, by teaching her to do what boys do, reconciled her to her adverse fate.

And so in time she learnt to ride "the Master's" bay, to wield the heavy salmon rod, to throw a fly, and sail a boat, and shoot a pheasant on the wing. And then "the Master" realised that she must learn to be a woman, and "the little Miss" was sent to school abroad. And Gilroy was told to look to it that "the little Missie's" gun and fishing tackle were kept in order against her coming home.

* * * * * * *

And things went on about the same as usual. In regular succession the flowers replaced each other in the trim kept beds, whilst in the orchard ripe apples thudded unnoticed to the ground. In autumn "the Master" shot the coverts, and rode to hounds in winter, and when Lent came round looked up his book of flies.

* * * * * * *

It was three years later, when the trees were all in blossom, that "the little Miss" came home.

Gilroy was busy in the garden potting out. He saw her walk across the lawn the same as ever, by "the Master's" side, just as she'd used to, except that now "the Master's" hand rested on her arm, instead of holding her hand in his.

She came straight up to Gilroy where he worked, and spoke to him "as nice as anythink." She was still "the little Miss"—yet different, being now "a woman grown." Gilroy straightened himself and touched his hat, and said "as he was glad to see her back," and hoped "as she was well." In rapid questions she asked after her pets—the boat, her rods, and gun—and laughingly said she must be very out of practice, and that Gilroy would have to teach her all again, and smiling she passed on down the path.

"Grandad," she said, "he is splendid, like a young Greek God who has been condemned to leave Olympus in order that he may learn to till the earth. I should like to paint him, to try and get that rich warm tone

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of wind and sun-tanned flesh, the outline of those muscles, and the whole expression of manly courage in his face and bearing. Do you think he would sit for me?" she asked.

The old man patted the girl's arm, and thought perhaps young Gilroy might be persuaded to take the part of model if she asked him to.

And so it came about that Gilroy, somewhat loth, posed daily for "the little Miss." The while she roughly sketched him in, she talked of places she had seen, of paintings, and of lovely music she had heard. Just as in days gone by she had told him, in the same bright way, of fairies, gnomes, and dwarfs.

And as she talked of this or that great man—of one who rose from shepherd boy to be the leading painter of his age; and how one spoilt his art to please his wife; and of a deaf musician who made such music that it would not cease to echo down the ages—he felt the distance widening that lay between him and his "little Miss." When he pulled the boat about the lake, or helped her bait her hook, or land a fish, he did it as her servant, and almost wished she would not thank him in the voice, whose very tone and accent raised her so far above him.

At his work in summer, in the garden, he would watch her talking to the guests who visited the house. He could see her ready smile, and catch the pleasant laugh as she passed from group to group. And, later, when the carriages had driven off, she would saunter round the garden with Mr. Launcelot—maybe he would take her on the lake, or just sit quietly on the terrace.

On such days as these, Gilroy would listen for the striking of the stable clock that set him free, and wonder that the heat had made him feel so tired.

They would take him with them in the boat when they went fishing, and, as he slowly rowed them on the lake, sunk deep between the hills where only sheep-bells broke the silence, and where the passing clouds made purple shadows on hills and lake—he would listen to their easy talk of men, and things, and books, and he would wonder at the way in which they turned each other's sayings into fun, and lightly laughed the time away. So different were they from himself, they seemed creatures of another world.

From time to time they would speak to him; Mr. Launcelot would tell him of rivers he had fished in Norway or in Canada; or perhaps it might be some piece of news out of the daily papers. And sometimes when "Miss Enid" had not been so lucky, she would take the oars in order that Gilroy off her rod might make up the deficiency. And when they landed Gilroy would stay behind to see to the boat, the fish, and tackle. He would stand and watch them out of sight, Miss Enid's slight little figure beside the man's, and would dimly wonder at the distance that divided him from them.

* * * * * *

The First was to "the Master" still a great event, and shooting superseded fishing.

Once more, in short cloth skirt and gaiters, with her gun, "Miss Enid" seemed "the little Miss" of long ago. "The Master" liked to have her with him, and with a buoyant ease she tramped across the fields and meadows, heedless of heavy dews and straggling blackberry trails.

The woods were scarcely touched with autumn, only stillness and the robin's song suggested closing summer. The drives in the hazel coppice were still crudely green, the underwood grew thickly, and in damp places toadstools gleamed redly amongst newly-fallen leaves.

"The Master," towards the close of September, suggested they should shoot the coppice, taking stray shots at any game that was disturbed.

Gilroy, to whom the order was given, thought it dangerous sport. He had in his time known more than one accident occur precisely in that very hazel coppice, but it was not his place to question the decision, and guns and dogs were ready at the appointed time.

The day went well, and already the sun was getting low, making it difficult, amongst the lights and shadows of the coppice, to correctly mark the game, when Gilroy noticed a partridge rise and cross the drive. He saw a gleaming barrel raised, and realised that Mr. Launcelot, not seeing Miss Enid hidden by the undergrowth, was taking aim, whilst she, unconscious of the gun, was looking at the bird.

There was no time to speak. He was not near enough to knock the gun aside. A shout might be misunderstood. There was but one thing to be done—to step into the drive and intercept the charge. He did not stop to calculate the nearness of the gun, nor reckon that the bird was flying fairly high. He only knew "Miss Enid" was in danger. That was enough.

The firing of the charge was followed by the startled flight of birds and fluttering to the earth of yellow leaves, and then a stillness.

"Oh, Launcelot! have you missed?"

Her voice rung clearly in the autumn air as, with an eager look, she stepped into the sunlight.

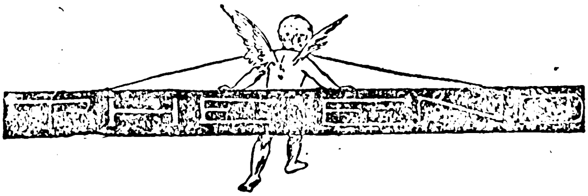
The smoke had lifted, and at her feet, lying across the drive, was Gilroy—dead.

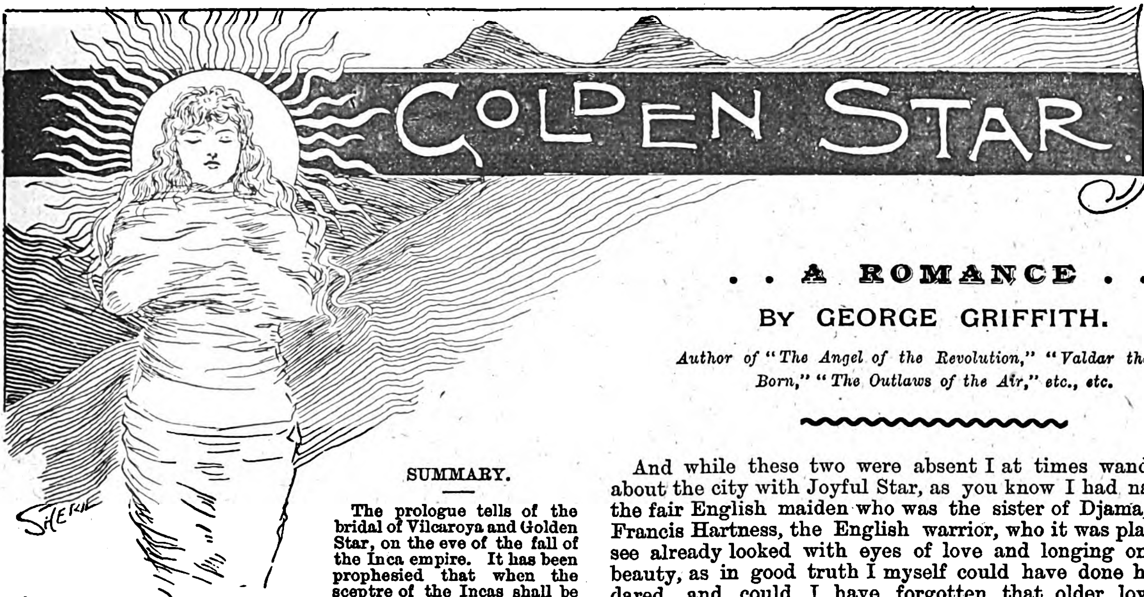
* * * * *

It was in the winter they were married. The churchyard path was swept and carpeted, whilst on either side the snow lay thick, obliterating in one glistening whiteness all unevenness in mounds and levelled graves.

Inside the church the waiting guests grew silent, as on a brass they read engraved the story tersely told of how a man laid down his life to save a friend.

Edith Escombe.





GOLDEN STAR

. . A ROMANCE . .

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

The prologue tells of the bridal of Vilcaroya and Golden Star, on the eve of the fall of the Inca empire. It has been prophesied that when the sceptre of the Incas shall be grasped by the hand of one who has been dead, and is alive again, the ancient glories of their empire shall be restored, and they dare the ordeal together. Three hundred years later Professor Martin Lamson brings to England a mummy from Peru. Laurens Djama undertakes to restore it to animation. The mummy is removed to Djama's laboratory, and in a week he shows the Professor his mummy alive. The Professor learns that he is the Vilcaroya of the legend. He asks for Golden Star, and they tell him that she has been dead for over three hundred years. He promises them that if they will restore her, too, to life he will give them untold treasures. He rapidly regains health and strength, and in six months the party embark for Peru. They meet in Panama a friend of Professor Lamson, Captain Hartness, who joins their party. On the way Hartness is told the whole story, and throws in his lot with the Inca. With Book II. begins Vilcaroya's personal narrative of his return to his own country and the events which resulted from it.

CHAPTER IX.

Brothers of the Blood.

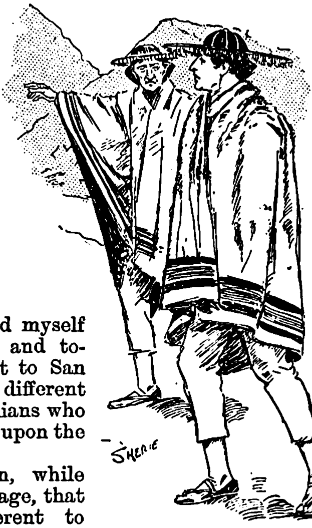
I shall not weary you who perchance may some day read this story of mine by dwelling on the sorrow and shame that filled me as I entered the foul, unlovely streets, and saw the filthy refuse in the squares of the city that I remembered so pure and bright and beautiful; nor yet of the feelings that possessed me when I saw the poor remains of our desecrated temples, the places where our vanished palaces had stood, and the dismantled ruins of that mighty fortress of Sacsahuaman, which I had last seen standing palace-crowned and throned in all its grandeur high up above the city.

All this and more you who read must picture for yourselves, for I have greater things to tell of than the poor sorrows of a wanderer who had left his own age and his own kindred far behind him, and who had come back into a strange world to find his country a wilderness and the children of his people the slaves of strangers.

It had been settled amongst us that for the purpose for which we had come it would be necessary to hire a house that should be at once commodious for our work, sufficiently removed from the city for privacy, and capable of defence against intruders if need be. The Professor, being already known in Cuzco as a man of science and seeker after antiquities, and possessing, moreover, a special permit from the Government in Lima to travel and dwell in the interior and make such searches as he thought fit, undertook the business of finding such a house. He made many journeys in quest of what he sought, and on these journeys Djama always accompanied him, since he had to see that the house chosen contained a chamber suitable for that precious work that he had undertaken to do in return for the share of treasure that I was to give him.

And while these two were absent I at times wandered about the city with Joyful Star, as you know I had named the fair English maiden who was the sister of Djama, and Francis Hartness, the English warrior, who it was plain to see already looked with eyes of love and longing on her beauty, as in good truth I myself could have done had I dared, and could I have forgotten that older love of mine, who, as I believed, still lay cold in her death-sleep in the cave by the lake yonder over the mountains to the westward, whither I had already cast so many longing glances. But at other times I left them to go upon my own ways, for I had work of my own on hand which, for the present, did not concern them.

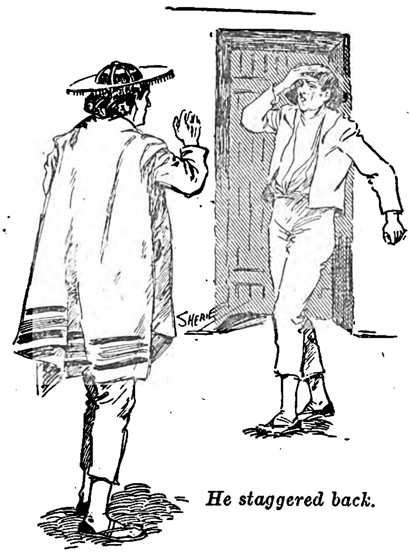
I had by this time met and conversed with many of my people in their own language, which was that of the labouring classes of my own times, and from them I had learned that at a village called San Sebastian, through which we had passed, about two leagues to the south of the city, there still dwelt many families of Ayllos—that is to say, the descendants of those of the old noble Inca lineage, who had been permitted by their conquerors to settle here. So one morning I went to visit an old Indian—as they now called all our people—named Ullullo, with whom I had made acquaintance, and at his house I dressed myself in the native fashion, in an old shirt and short trousers, with sandals on my feet, and a broad brimmed fringed hat on my head, and covered myself with a faded poncho, and together we went on foot to San Sebastian, I looking no different from the rest of the Indians who were passing to and fro upon the road.



Together we went on foot to San Sebastian.

I had already seen, while riding through the village, that the people were different to those of all other villages that we had come through on the way. They were taller in stature, prouder in carriage, and fairer of face. The blood showed red in their cheeks through the light brown of their skin, and these signs had told me that if any remnant of the pure Inca race was left these must be they, and I was soon to have proof that it was so, although the children of those who had lived in palaces were now dwelling in huts of mud and reeds.

Ullullo led me first to the house of a man named Tupac-Rayca, who was chief among the Indians of the town. He was great grandson of that ill-fated Tupac-Amaru, who, as you know, had revolted many years before against the oppressors of his race, and for this, after being forced to watch the brutal murder of his wife in the square of Cuzco, had himself been torn to pieces by horses.



He staggered back.

We found him alone in a bare room in one of the better houses of the village. As he stood up to salute us it needed but a glance to tell me that in his veins at least the ancient blood of our race flowed well-nigh as purely as it did in my own. Had it not been for the meanness of his clothing and the dull brooding look on his noble features—the stamp of generations of oppression—I could have pictured him with the yellow Llautu* on his brow, the golden image of the Sun on his girdled tunic, and the rainbow banner in his hand, standing amongst the guards of the great Huayni-Capac himself.

I asked Ullullo to leave us alone for a little while, and when he had gone I stepped forward and, drawing myself up to my full height, I looked him in the eyes, and said in the tongue that was spoken only by those of the divine Inca race:

"Tell me, Tupac-Rayca, does a remnant of the Children of the Sun still dwell in the Land of the Four Regions, and are they still faithful to the traditions of their race, and the faith of their ancestors?"

As the words left my lips he staggered back a pace or two with his hands to his forehead, staring at me from under them as though—as in very truth it was—some spirit of the past stood re-embodied before him. Then, coming forward again and scanning me eagerly from head to foot, he whispered in the same tongue—by the Lord of Light how those familiar accents thrilled my ears as I heard them after so long!

"Who are you, a stranger, that comes in the image of those long dead, to ask me such a question in the tongue that may only be spoken when none save those of the Blood are present?"

"One who is of the Blood himself," I answered, taking a stride towards him, and stretching out my hand. "Fear not, Tupac-Rayca, son of him that suffered, I am a friend, and have come from afar to work as a friend with you and others of the Blood that may still be left in the land, with a great and holy purpose, of which you shall know ere long."

He grasped my hand and bowed over it in silence for a while. Then he stepped back and looked at me again, murmuring:

"Can it be so? Has the divine Manco come back from the Mansions of the Sun to save the remnant of his children, or has Vilcaroya broken the bonds of his death-sleep and come to fulfil the oath he swore with Golden Star before the altar in the sanctuary? I know all the Children of the Blood that are left in the land, and I have never seen your face before, yet you *are* of the Blood. Who are you—Lord?"

The last word seemed forced from his lips by some power other than his own will, and it sounded most pleasant to me, for it told me that, without knowing my name, and seeing me only as a stranger, he had recognised the stamp of my divine ancestry, and this promised well for the progress of the work I had in hand. I answered him kindly, and yet as one speaking to another who is scarce his equal, and said:

"My name matters not now or here, Tupac, for we are but two, and I might lie to you, and you would have no proof of my truth or falsehood. But if you will do as I bid you, to-night you shall know and all shall be made plain and with ample proof. Are you willing to give me your aid?"

He picked up a rude hoe that stood in a corner of the room, and, laying it across his shoulders after the manner of one who bears a burden, bowed his head and answered:

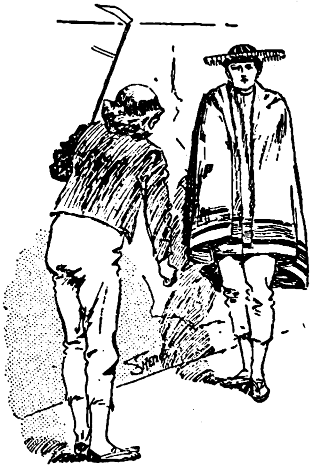
"The Son of the Sun has but to speak, and I and all his slaves will obey."

What he had done was an act of homage, which, in the olden time, was paid only to him who wore the imperial Llautu, and proved to me how faithfully the old traditions had been preserved in secret.

"That is well said, Tupac," I replied, speaking now as a Sovereign might speak to a faithful subject, "and in the days to come fear not that I shall forget this your first act of unasked-for homage. Now, hear me. Are there twenty men of the Blood in this village, men who are faithful and can be trusted even to the death?"

"There are five hundred here, Lord, and as many thousands within the valley, whose blood has flowed pure from the olden times, unpolluted by a single stain of Spanish dirt. What would you with them?"

"I asked not for hundreds or thousands," I said, right glad at heart to hear such good tidings. "For the present I need but a score, so do you chose me twenty of the noblest blood and the best judgment, and an hour before midnight let them be with you on the plain behind the Sacsahuaman. Let them come well provided with torches or candles, and tools, levers, and hammers and spades. Tell them what has passed between us, but nothing of the guesses that you may have made in your own mind when we have been talking, and leave the rest to me. Can you do that?"



He picked up a rude hoe.

"It shall be done, Lord," he answered, still bending before me with the shaft of the hoe across his shoulders, "and we will wait and toil in patience till the Son of the Sun shall please to reveal himself to the eyes of his servants."

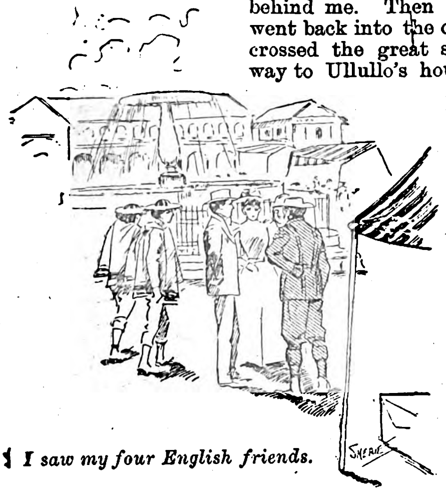
"Nor shall you have to wait long," I said. "Now put that off your back and take my hand again, for we are not Inca and servant yet, only two men of the Blood, and brothers of a fallen race who are joined together to perform a holy work. Now farewell, Tupac, till to-night. Choose your companions well, and fear not but that your services and your faithfulness shall have their due reward.”

---

* The yellow Llautu, or fringed turban of wool, worn on the brows, was the distinguishing mark of the sacred Inca race. The scarlet was worn only by the reigning Inca—"Son of the Sun." Its fringe, called the "borla," was mingled with threads of gold.

He put his hand humbly and tremblingly into mine, bowing low over it, and so I left him, standing there with bent head, not daring to look up until the door closed behind me. Then Ullullo and I went back into the city, and as we crossed the great square on our way to Ullullo’s house I saw my four English friends standing among the market people by the fountain in the centre. We passed close to them, and I heard my name spoken by Joyful Star to her brother, who answered her and said:

“I dare say we shall find he is making friends again with some of these filthy Indian compatriots of his.”



I saw my four English friends.

I hated him from that moment for his bitter words, and swore in my heart that some day he should pay for them, for I loved my people, and pitied them in their misery and degradation. I stopped beside them, and my heart was beating hard as I listened for what Joyful Star would say, and I have remembered her words, even as I have remembered his. She looked at him with the light of anger in her eyes, and said:

“For shame, Laurens! I couldn’t have believed that you would have said such a thing. If you belonged to a race that had been enslaved and plundered by these brutes of Spaniards and Peruvians for three centuries and a half, do you think you would be any better than these poor fellows? And, besides, whatever they are, they are Vilcaroya’s people, and he is our friend.”

I could have fallen on the stones and kissed her feet for those sweet words of hers, and I moved away quickly for fear I should betray myself, and went with a swelling heart and mingled tears of love and anger in my eyes to old Ullullo’s house, where I changed my clothes again, and then, as it was nearly dinner time, which, as you know, is in the evening in Spanish countries, I went back to the house where we were lodging, wondering what they would think if they could have understood the words that had passed between Tupac-Rayca and myself.

CHAPTER X.

Wife or Sister?

When I met my friends and the man who, as the warning voice in my heart already told me, would one day be my enemy, I saw that they would willingly have learned what had become of me during the day, but I answered their inquiries by telling them nothing more and yet a great deal less than the truth, and saying that I had spent the day revisiting old scenes, and learning what I could of the present condition of my people. This satisfied them outwardly at least, though I saw a look in Djama’s eyes which told me that he suspected more of the truth than it suited my purpose to tell him.

Then our conversation turned to the matter of procuring a house, such as I have spoken of, and the Professor told me that he had heard of a hacienda, well built and solid, and standing in its own domain, about three leagues across the valley to the westward, on a secluded little plain among the hills, which would serve our purpose excellently; but the owner of it wished to sell it, and “with the stupidity of these Peruvians,” as he said, would not hire it out to us but would only sell it, and the price was twenty thousand soles, or dollars of Peru, which was two thousand pounds in English money.

“It is a great pity,” said the Professor, when he had finished telling me about it, “for it doesn’t seem as though there was another house in the neighbourhood of Cuzco that would suit our purpose, and this one would do perfectly.”

“Of course, if the fellow won’t let it there’s no use thinking any more about the matter, for two thousand pounds is entirely out of the question. It seems to me that the expedition will be quite expensive enough without the luxury of buying houses at fancy prices.”

It was Djama who spoke. No one else at our table could have spoken like that. I heard him in silence, for I could not trust myself to speak for the anger that was rising within me. I saw Joyful Star raise her eye-lids and look at him with a swift glance that meant much, but she, too, said nothing, and then, looking at me, he spoke again and said:

“Of course, if his Highness”—for so he always spoke of me when no strangers were present—“would just unlock one of those treasure-houses of his, the matter would be easy enough, but I suppose that’s outside the contract.”

I still kept silence, knowing as I did what the night was to bring forth. But Francis Hartness answered for me, and said:

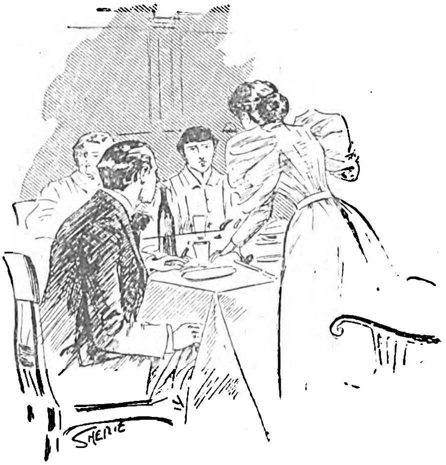
“I don’t think you can quite put it that way, Djama, if you’ll excuse me saying so. If I am not mistaken, it has been clearly understood that the first treasure-house to be unlocked is the one that holds Vilcaroya’s greatest treasure, his wife, and what you say seems to suggest——”

“It is enough,” I said, unconsciously speaking in my growing anger in the same imperious tone that I had used but a few hours before to Tupac. “Let the house be bought. I will charge myself with the cost, and I will be the debtor of my friends no longer.”

They stared at me as I spoke, for hitherto I had spoken to them as a child rather than as a man, as an inferior rather than as an equal. I saw a smile that was not pleasant to look upon pass swiftly over Djama’s mouth, but he kept silence, and the Professor said to me:

“Are you really in earnest, Vilcaroya? You know according to our bargain we have no claim on you until our part of the work is done first. None of us have any desire to learn your secrets.”

“I am not talking of secrets,” I said, breaking into his speech, “and one of my race does not speak to make a liar of himself. What I say I can do and will, for I wish the work to begin at once. Do you think I have not waited long enough for my beloved, my sister and my wife?”



Rising suddenly from her seat.

"Your what!" cried Joyful Star, rising suddenly from her seat and staring at me with fixed and wide-opened eyes. "Your *sister!* Oh, Vilcaroya, surely that is not true," and as she said this I saw her cheeks grow pale and her lips tremble.

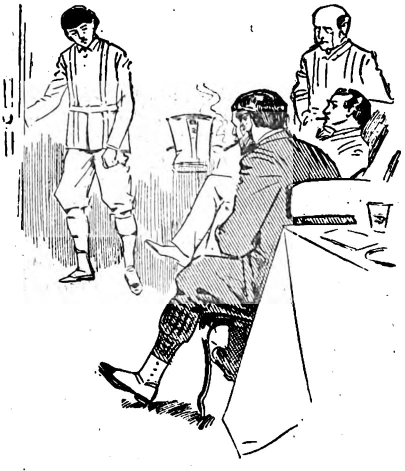
"Yes," I answered, "it is true. Why should I lie to my new sister and friend, Joyful Star? Golden Star was the daughter of my father, the great Huayni-Capac, though our mothers were not the same."

I had no time to finish my speech, for with a look of unutterable horror in her eyes, which pierced me to the heart and seemed to sever it in twain, she cried:

"Oh, no, no; that is too horrible! I can hear no more. I will go back to England to-morrow. Laurens, come to my room, I want to speak to you at once."

So saying she went to the door and opened it and went out, followed by her brother, who looked at me as he passed me with a look which I never forgot or forgave, for it was like the words that I had heard him say to her in the square.

"What is this?" I said to the Professor when the door had closed behind them. "What have I said or done that Joyful Star should look with horror upon me and say such cruel words?"



Bowing farewell to the others.

I saw him exchange glances full of meaning with the English soldier before he answered me; and then, leaning his arms on the table in front of him, he said, in that quiet calm voice of his:

"My dear Vilcaroya, it is a very strange thing, and, as far as Miss Djama is concerned, perhaps, a very great pity that this has never come out before, for without knowing it you have given her a shock that may have very painful consequences. No, don't interrupt me now, for the sooner I can make you understand the meaning of your words to her the better. It is in this way: we know, of course, that in your day and among your people sister-marriage was held to be the most sacred of all marriages. We know that from such a marriage only might spring the wearer of the imperial Borla. No other descent was held to be pure enough for the Son of the Sun; but to us the idea of such a marriage is so unutterably horrible and revolting that of all the crimes that could be committed by one of our race that would be the most fearful. It is a thing that does not even permit itself to be discussed amongst us. It cannot be discussed. It should not even be spoken of, and yet you, in the most perfect innocence, have spoken of it in the presence of—— Good Heavens, Hartness! what is to be done? Do you think Miss Djama was really in earnest when she talked of going back to England to-morrow? It is impossible—it would ruin everything."

I kept silence, for my sorrow and wonder were too great for words, but I listened eagerly for what Francis Hartness would say in reply.

"She was in earnest when she spoke," he said, as quietly as the Professor had spoken; "but if the Doctor has as much sense as I give him credit for, she will have seen the thing in a different light by this time. Of course, she has read Prescott, and she really knows as much about the marriage customs of the ancient Incas as we do. In fact, to tell you the truth"—and as he said this I saw him frown, and an angry light came into his eyes that I had never seen in them before—"I really can hardly understand how, knowing that as she does know it, she can have been as horrified as she certainly was. She knows perfectly well that Vilcaroya has come at a single step, as it were, from his age into ours, and so must have brought all the ideas and beliefs of his time and his people with him. Depend upon it a little reflection will very soon show her that horrible and all as the idea must naturally have appeared to her at the first shock of hearing it, she will see that from Vilcaroya's point of view there is nothing in it but what is perfectly natural and proper. Now, to my mind, the matter is much more sad and serious for Vilcaroya himself than for anyone else."

As he said this he turned from the Professor to me and went on, addressing me in a tone so frank and kindly that ever afterwards I looked upon him as my friend and my brother:

"It's not a pleasant thing for me to say, and it must, of course, be a very painful one for you to hear; still, it's got to be said some time or other, and, unless I am wrong in what I think of you, I believe you are man enough to hear it and to agree with me that it had better be said now than later on, when the saying of it might be tenfold more painful both to you and us."

"Say on," I said shortly. "Your tongue is straight and your eyes look into mine as those of a friend should look. I am listening."

"I would wish for no better friend than you, Vilcaroya, after that, for I know what you mean. Now, what I have to say is this. We know, of course, that you look upon yourself as doubly married to this love of yours, who is dead, and, like you, may yet be alive again. You are bound to her, not only by a marriage which in the time that it took place was perfectly lawful and natural, but also by the oath that you took together. But you have come back to the world in another age and among another people, and now that marriage is, by the common consent of all civilised humanity, not only unlawful, but, as the Professor has just said, unnatural and horrible beyond conception.

"Therefore, if Golden Star is restored to life, for you to love her, save as a brother, or for you to perpetuate the union, which, as you have told us, began and ended before the altar of the Sun, would be to make not only yourself, but your—your sister, Golden Star, as well, looked upon with horror and loathing by every civilised man and woman that knew your story. I am speaking strongly because it is necessary.

"You might succeed in all your aims, you might realise every ambition of your life, and yet I tell you it is Heaven's own truth, that if you took Golden Star to sit beside you on the throne of the Incas as your wife and queen, you would place her upon a pinnacle of infamy that men would spit upon and women turn their backs on. The reward of all your labours, the price of all your treasures, no matter how great they might be, would be nothing but a curse that would fall heavily on you, but a thousand times more heavily on the woman that you have loved best in all the world."

He stopped, and they both sat and looked at me in silence, awaiting for me to answer him. As for me, I felt my spirit wandering over a bare wilderness where all was dark.

I knew that he had spoken truth, strange as the truth seemed to me, for no man could have heard his voice and seen the steady light in his eyes without knowing that he was a true man, and so spoke the truth. The moments passed, and I could still find no words to say. Then the silence was broken by the opening of the door, and Djama came in and said:

"My sister wishes you to excuse her coming back to the table. Of course, I have explained matters to her, and I think she now sees them in a different light, but for some reason or other she seems strangely shaken. You know how extremely sensitive she is, and so, as her doctor, as well as her brother, I have sent her to bed. She wasn't really fit to come back after what has happened, and a night's rest will be the best thing in the world for her. I suppose you two have explained things to his Highness as well, eh?"

"Yes," I said, rising from my seat. "It has been explained to me. I do not understand all now, but I must think, and think alone, so I will go."

Then I went to Francis Hartness and held out my hand to him and said, after the fashion of the English:

"Good-night, Captain Hartness. You have wounded me sorely with your words, yet you have spoken them as only a friend could speak them. From now till the day of my death or yours, Vilcaroya Inca is your friend, and all his people are your servants."

Then I took my hand from his, and bowing farewell to the others, walked swiftly out of the room and got my cloak and went out into the city to think in silence by myself over the strange and terrible things that I had heard, and to calm my spirit before I went to do the work which in a few hours would be awaiting me on the hills behind the Sacsahuaman.

(To be continued.)

A WOMAN'S HONOUR.

IT was a snowy, blustering December night. Young Percy Padgett had arrived by an evening train from Oxford. Fresh from college, and scarcely twenty-two, he had come in the vanity of his youth to make himself an actor in the metropolis. It is true he is a successful architect now, and his name is not enrolled among the famous ones of the stage, but to make the public acknowledge his histrionic genius was then the first aspiration of his soul.

Before presenting his letters of introduction to the managers, and allowing them to fight out between themselves which should have him, he determined to devote a day or two to the inspection of the great city, which he now saw for the first time. So, after a hasty meal at the hotel, he sauntered out to mingle with the throng in the brilliant thoroughfare. Wearying of the glitter of Regent Street, he at last turned into one of the darker streets, to make his way towards Piccadilly, his curiosity impelling him thitherward, although the wind began to blow nippingly and the snow to come in thicker clouds.

The buildings were, as usual in these side streets, uniform, tall, and very exclusive in their frowning stateliness.

In several, however, there were bright lights, and from one especially there came the sounds of music and the merry laughter of children.

Homesick, lonely, and, truth to say, somewhat abashed by his first experience with the great world which he had thought so easy to conquer, he felt his heart glow under the inspiration of this mirth, and an uncontrollable curiosity seized him. The window curtains were drawn aside, and from the opposite side of the street a full view of the parlours and of the young merry-makers might be had.

The wanderer crossed, and, ascending the steps of the opposite house—a grand, but gloomy, unlighted mansion, and sheltering himself from the wind and snow under the projecting stonework about the doorway, enjoyed the moving spectacle with a zest that was brightened by his lonely position and dismal surroundings. He had been snugly ensconced in the doorway less than a minute, however, when the door suddenly opened behind him, nearly precipitating him into the hall.

A hand seized his arm, he was drawn in, and the door closed behind him.

"Hush! Follow me!" came a whisper in a woman's voice. All was dark save the faint light that made its way from a heavily-shaded library lamp in a back room, the door of which was open. Padgett would have asked for an explanation, but the female figure was already gliding up the stairs, and, being young and self-reliant, he reflected that he would prefer to follow out the adventure, even if he should have his choice, which he had not by any means, so far as the affair had gone.

The explanation might be made as well upstairs as down, he reasoned; so he pursued the mysterious figure. It flitted before him noiselessly, and then disappeared through a doorway on the second floor, through which a faint light came out to struggle ineffectually with the darkness.

Without further hesitation, he followed into an elegantly-furnished boudoir. The guide paused at a centre table, and turned up the shaded lamp, which had been burning dimly. Before him, with the table between them, stood a lovely woman, queenly in stature and grace of bearing, and attired with a taste that was in keeping with the refined air and haughty manner of the wearer.

No sooner did the increased light enable her to distinguish his features than the woman gave a stifled cry, and a look of horror distorted her beautiful face.

"What's this? You are not Walter Vane?" she cried.

"No, madam; I'm Percy Padgett, an actor in search of an engagement. What can I do for you?" replied the involuntary guest, with a desperate assurance.

"What are you doing here? Go; leave me! You should not have come," moaned the lady, wringing her hands.

"If you will be cool and think a little, madam," he replied, "you'll recollect the fact that I am not to blame for being here—that I was, in fact, dragged in."

"I mistook you for another person. Now go away," said the unwilling hostess, in great terror.

"Fear nothing. I understand the mistake," said the young man, "although I must say it was a strange one."

"Go! Go!" she cried.

He bowed, and moved towards the door.

A sound made him pause. The woman heard it too. It was the opening and shutting of a heavy door to the hall. A step was ascending the staircase.

She sprang forward and laid her hand on his arm.

"Someone is coming," she whispered, in great agitation. "You cannot go now. Stay if you would save a woman's honour———"

"Anything to be obliging; but really my first evening in London is a lively one," assented the young man, as coolly as ever; "and where——"

Escape to the hall was impossible. The footsteps were drawing near, and in another moment the newcomer, cautiously as he was advancing, would be in the room.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, the visitor darted into a cupboard, the only hiding-place at hand, and had barely closed the door behind him when the second visitor arrived.

The cupboard door had, however, been left slightly ajar by Padgett in the haste of his retreat, and he had a partial view of what went on in the apartment after his retirement. He kept his eyes open to events, for his position was far from reassuring.

The new comer entered the apartment with some caution. He was not, then, the husband of the lady, as the would-be actor had supposed. What was going to happen now? He began to wish himself out of the scrape. Might he not find an opportunity to steal out, glide down the stairs, and so into the street? To be taken for a thief if caught in this plight? No, that would never do. He would stay where he was and trust to luck.

The last visitor was a tall handsome man, of soldierly bearing, blonde, blue-eyed, elegant in dress and manners, and not far beyond thirty. He cast a suspicious glance about him.

"We are alone?" he inquired.

The woman, who received him standing at the opposite side of the table, answered with a cold nod. Her air was more haughty and frigid than before.

"I was surprised that you risked leaving the door ajar for me. I took it for a good omen, Clara. Was I right?" remarked the guest.

The lady thus familiarly addressed started as if stung by the inference of his free tone, and replied deliberately, her petulance disappearing as her earnestness asserted itself:

"Mr Vane, this is the first interview we have had in three years."

"Yes, since the eve of your wedding, when you promised to elope with me. When I appeared at the rendezvous, you refused to keep your promise, and said you were simply amusing yourself with me. Then your marriage was hastened, and took place while I was waiting at another trysting place for you to keep your promise. So you made my humiliation complete. Oh, I don't forget it," interrupted the handsome visitor throwing open his fur-lined overcoat, and throwing himself nonchalantly into an easy chair.

The woman remained standing, pale with resolution, and resumed:

"I was a silly girl. I foolishly toyed with your affections, and Heaven knows I have had cause to regret my cruel folly. Since my marriage I have never known peace. You have pursued me everywhere with letters—abroad and at home. My servants have been bribed to hand me your missives in my husband's house, and strangers have thrust them into my hands in the streets, at the opera, or in the restaurant, forcing on me a secret correspondence that is my terror."

There was a slight sound from the cupboard. It was Padgett, making a desperate effort to restrain his desire "to hit that fellow just once," as he expressed it in a whisper. The visitor received this accusation coolly, and replied:

"True, but if you suffer, imagine my state. Is it nothing to lose the one woman you love? You may have pretended affection; I did not; I loved you in earnest, with all my heart, for ever."

The woman shuddered at the intensity of his tone. There was something alarming in it.

"Is he going to kill her?" thought Padgett, watching every movement keenly.

There was indeed a blaze of insanity in the eyes of the guest that would have alarmed the stoniest heart. The lady quailed a moment before him, but by a strong effort of the will recovered her self-possession and continued:

"You have demanded a personal and private interview that I may be still further compromised."

"Yes, I have asked this for years, confident that if I might speak with you and plead my suffering your own heart would judge me favourably," replied the visitor with a fierce earnestness.

"I? Another man's wife?" There was a preceptible softening in the tones of the woman's voice, despite the effort she made at indignation.

"His wife? No—he stole you! You are mine by right. A foolish impulse, a girlish prank made you his. Your heart is mine!"

The ferocity with which the man said this startled even Padgett, who was following the dramatic scene with eager attention from his place of concealment. The visitor had, for the moment, the air of a madman.

The woman shuddered and grew pale with terror, but with a mighty effort seemed to shake off her fear, and regained her self-possession. She went on, in her former cold and haughty tone:

"Finally, to effect your purpose, you had recourse to threats. You reminded me that during my girlish flirtation I had written you letters——"

"Yes, avowing your love, and agreeing to our elopement," interrupted the man bitterly.

The young wife trembled visibly at this reminder of her folly, but with an effort continued:

"You threatened to send those letters to my husband; but you seem to have relented, for I, though doubting you, have given you this rendezvous on the offer on your part to return my letters and cease this torture," said the lady, twitching her fingers nervously, as if eager to lay hands on the fatal missives.

"And I have kept my promise," returned her handsome guest. "Here they are."

He drew a packet from a pocket of his coat and placed it on the table. The woman bounded forward with the air of a tigress, and laid her hand on them. He still retained them with a firm hold, however, and thus they remained.

"One moment," said he. "Remember, when you take these they are my gift, in the hope that pity may assert itself in your heart, that you may be led to a similar generosity in restoring me my happiness as I restore you yours."

Her eyes met his with a soft, languishing expression. He released the packet, and she drew it to her eagerly. Tearing off the wrapping she ran her eyes over the dozen dainty little billets with a hungry glare, casting each into the flame of the open grate, where the fire was sending up its bright and cheering flames. The last she set on fire, holding it in her hand until it was consumed, and fell in ashes at her feet. A glitter of triumph shone in her eyes, and her form straightened up proudly. Fixing on her guest a look of mingled scorn and hate, she exclaimed:

"Fool! My long slavery is at an end! You are disarmed, and I am free!"

"I am not disarmed!" he cried, suddenly changing his manner from soft humility to violent command. "I had not faith in you, I suspected your false heart. Here, I have retained the most compromising of all your letters—that proposing the elopement three years ago. It bears no date, and no one could prove that it was not written yesterday. Here it is, sealed in this stamped envelope, and bearing the club address of your husband."

The woman grew pale.

"I held this," he resumed moodily, as he replaced the letter in his pocket, "in the hope of forcing your heart to awaken to the old love; but you have shown me how false it is. Such a heart as yours, madam, is not worth the leading away, as I might lead it by the chain I hold here. But my sufferings at your hands must be avenged, and your cruel heart must have a bitter punishment. This is my revenge."

He took from his pocket a carefully-folded paper, and shaking a greenish powder into a glass half filled with water, which stood on the table, swallowed the mixture at a gulp.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the lady, regarding her visitor with a look of intense horror.

"I mean that I have taken poison," he replied wildly; "that in a few minutes I shall be a corpse. When your husband and your friends return account for my presence as you may. Reflect that you have wrecked my life, that you have been the cause of my death!"

As he said the last words his speech became thick, his eyes rolled wildly in their sockets, he staggered, balanced a moment erect, with a horrible smile on his twitching and distorted features, and then pitching forward, fell to the floor on his face, with a dreadful thud, and lay there motionless. The lady gave a shriek, and rushed forward to save him. She only caught his arm, however, and the weight of his body brought her to her knees beside him. She put her arms about him and turned his face up to the light.

"Dead! dead!" she cried frantically, dropping the head of the corpse in her terror. Then, on a sudden impulse, she began an eager search of the body, ending in the production of the sealed letter the dead man had so boastfully displayed. Tottering forward towards the grate she flung it into the fire, and, with an hysterical laugh, watched it burn.

As she turned she found herself face to face with young Padgett. He was pale and evidently horror-stricken. She trembled violently at the sight of him. In the excitement of the terrible scene she had quite forgotten the presence of the unbidden witness.

She shrank from him as from an accuser.

Pointing to the corpse, she cried: "They will say I murdered him!" and fell to the floor in a deep swoon.

Padgett stood for a moment bewildered between the living and the dead; then, suddenly arousing himself, exclaimed: "He was a crazy scoundrel, and he did the right thing to kill himself. But to do it here! What an awful revenge if it be carried out to the end! But it shan't be if I can help it!"

The rash young Padgett made his way down the stairs, opened the street door wide, stepped out, and looked up and down the street. Not a soul was visible. The snow was coming down in a blinding cloud, and the wind was driving it into heavy drifts. Returning to the apartment where he had passed an hour of such terrifying captivity, he, without more ado, seized the contorted corpse of the crazy lover, and shouldering it, staggered down the staircase with his gruesome burden. Out into the drifts he made his way, and through the storm-torn mists of the night.

The next morning the body of Walter Vane was found some distance away, lying in a snow drift near the haunt of the bad characters who frequent one of the side streets. It seemed plain to the coroner that the young man had been drugged and robbed.

Padgett had no inclination to reveal the truth, so he did not appear to correct the error. He had saved the honour of a woman, and defeated the ends of a villain or a maniac. The woman he never met or heard of again; but a month later, when led to her home with his curiosity, he found the house vacant, and on inquiring of a servant lounging at the gateway of an adjacent residence, he learnt that the occupants, an invalid lady and her husband, had gone abroad, and the dwelling was for sale.

Annie Davis.

KILLED BY MISTAKE

"I TOLD you I left Bradley's, didn't I?" he began, after a pause, and then continued in a dull, monotonous voice, as though repeating a lesson, "well, that was in '60, and from there I joined a large circus and menagerie that travelled about from place to place, stopping at the large towns, or where we were likely to get an audience. I got on very well with them, for in those days it was something out of the common to see performances on the trapeze, and I took immensely.

"I was dressed in skins to resemble a cat, with a tail all complete, and only my face was left exposed; and here, for the first time, I found my strong arms and small light body an advantage, for as the children—little guessing the reason—used to declare, I looked 'exactly like a cat'; and as the money taken increased nightly, I naturally rose into high favour with the circus-master.

"There was only one other in my line, and that was a girl—Lizzie. She was very beautiful, and she was very good, and from the first she took a curious liking for me, which astonished no one more than it did myself. Partly we were thrown very much together, for of course we practised a good deal, and then there were new tricks to be learned, and so on; partly she was a quiet, gentle sort of girl, very different from the rest of the troupe, and then I knew she pitied me, and pity, they say, leads to love.

"From the first moment that I saw her sweet, serious face I had worshipped her as the loveliest and purest thing that had ever come into my hard and miserable life, so when, after two years' patient waiting, Lizzie taught me the words that otherwise I should never have dared to utter, I spoke them in all thankfulness, and held her to me with such a sense of rapturous bliss that angels might have envied. And so we were married, and one short month after, a third performer, Wintle by name, came to join us.

"How intensely I grew to loathe that man no words can tell. He was a fine, tall man, with a quiet wit, and steady nerve, and strong as a giant. When Lizzie came flying through the air—for we had new tricks now, of which he was the mainstay—he would catch her in his arms and run with her up the ropes, while I, poor cripple, knew were I to attempt it it would mean death to us both.

"I stood below, envying him for his strength, and hating him for the power it gave him. Lizzie liked him. She told me so many times, never dreaming of the jealous, watchful gaze; I looked after them as they dived, and flew, and swung together; and so the weeks went on.

"At last, Bates (the manager) arranged a regular little play to be acted by us three while we were in the air, and every one predicted it would be an enormous success. I was to retain my famous part, by which I had gained my name of the cat-clown; Lizzie, with her sweet face and innocent, child-like eyes, was to be queen of the fairies; Robert Wintle was to be her earthly lover; and the first performance was to take place on the fifth of November.

"One of my great hits was to be counterfeiting terror at a position in which I had been placed by the queen's orders. It was an immense height, almost at the top of the building, and far away from any staves or ropes, so that after the rope which conveyed me there was withdrawn, I was utterly powerless to descend.

"The way I hung on to the bar, and my ludicrous efforts to maintain my seat, were declared inimitable by the manager and the ground clowns, and I anticipated a splendid piece of business on the grand night. We were three weeks rehearsing it, and it was during that time I first noticed a secret understanding between my Lizzie and Wintle.

"He seemed uneasy, embarrassed, most unlike his usual self, but he followed Lizzie like her shadow, and I followed him. I saw it all now, but alas! too late. Bitterly I reproached myself with having let her marry me through pity, and it was the thought that it was only pity I had won that was the hardest sting of all. But none the less surely did I hate the man who had succeeded where I had failed, and none the less was I set on my revenge.

"At last I overheard some words of theirs, not many. A few gentle words from Wintle—a kiss—a sigh—a murmur of 'Robert, I am so happy' in a girl's voice, and then, as I drew back from the darkness, my wife came from the room and passed me, with a glad smile upon her lips. I followed her. Not to accuse her. I left that for others to do, when my work should have succeeded, but I went straight to the circus and clambered up the ropes to the platform from which we started.

"There were no men about to interrupt me. Even had there been no one would have dreamed of interfering, for it was my daily business to see to every catch and rope, and bar, before the performance took place, and it now wanted but an hour to the time, and the grand night, too, as I thought, with fiendish glee, as I scrambled over the netting and felt it all with care; I gave very particular care to one bar, and then I descended and looked up.

"One of the grandest bits of this fairy scene was towards the end, when Lizzie, as the queen, was flying at the left side of the netting, and Wintle, at the extreme right, was executing some wonderful gymnastics on the horizontal bar. He wound up by jerking himself off into space, and then, after turning a somersault, catching by his knees to another bar which hung some twelve feet below. It was a very difficult trick, and one over which he was nervous, for should the lower bar by any miraculous chance give way, nothing could prevent him falling, and as in such a position it was impossible to calculate distances, he would be quite as likely to fall outside as inside the net.

"The entertainment was half over, the Peruvian horses had been duly admired, and the jugglers' tricks were finished, when the band struck up an inspiriting march, composed in our honour, and before the applause which greeted our entrance had subsided, we were hanging on the central rope, and bowing our acknowledgments—the new play had begun.

"They cheered us to the echo. Never had fairy looked more lovely than Lizzie in her silver dress; the prince was charming, the cat superb, every one declared, and then following on the applause came a breathless silence as they awaited the grand finale.

I was swung up to my lofty perch, and the 'courtship,' as we called the coquetting on the tight-rope, soon began below me.

"Lizzie advancing from the right and Wintle from the left, they were to cross each other in the centre and each to go to the opposite end, and then to begin those 'fairy flights' which brought the play to a conclusion. Seated there, while continuing my own business of mock fright and dismay, my straining eyes were fixed upon those two—the wife who had betrayed me, and the man who had dared to win her from me.

"Wilder and wilder grow my actions as I dodge to and fro on my perch for fear I should lose one movement of theirs; and the laughter rings from below as bright eyes fix upon me. 'Look at the clown! look at his antics!' they cry, and I—I am nearly blinded by my whole soul rushing to my eyes as I hang there waiting—waiting to see him fall. See, now he waves the fan, the signal she should pass him.

"Now, Lizzie, gently! Why, what is this? She draws back, whispering something; her lips move. I cannot catch the words, but I know their meaning. 'She hasn't the nerve,' she says, 'to-night; she cannot pass him,' and—am I blind? Am I falling? She turns back the same way, to the right, to his side! 'Lizzie!'

"In good earnest I hang forward, now collecting my strength for a warning cry—'Lizzie!' Is it my voice that sounds in that half-choked agonised whisper that scarcely stirs the air about me? I turn my eyes to the audience below, gesticulating wildly for the help that in a few minutes will be too late, but they laugh back their answers to me. How splendidly I am acting to-night!

"I must get down a rope—Where is my rope?—and I turn to clutch at the support which carried me up just as she reaches the topmost bar—I—I forgot. They took it away. My hand closes on empty air, and then—a few minutes of awful, sickening terror, while the ringing cheers burst forth afresh, and the fairy swings gaily to and fro—and, then, a frightful scream, a rush of horror-stricken people towards the useless net, and in their midst, there, on the cruel floor, Lizzie—my Lizzie—dead!

"I do not know how I got down, I don't know anything that happened after that, except that I saw Wintle married. He married a girl belonging to the troupe; and she told me it was Lizzie who had arranged it all quietly for them, and that it was to her, and not to Lizzie, that the kiss and the words had been given. But somehow," added the man wearily, "I don't seem to be able to think of that.

"It's now ten years ago to-day," he began again, presently; and when, after a few words of sympathy, I was obliged to leave him, he was still mechanically repeating the words which had just attracted me, "Lizzie, killed by mistake."

W. H.

On WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 9,
We shall publish the First Number of a New Weekly Paper, to be called:

Pearson's
STORY TELLER.

It will consist wholly of continued stories. The opening chapters of eight entirely new novels will be found in the first number.

A GRAND OFFER
TO READERS OF THE
STORY TELLER.

PEARSON'S WEEKLY will give, for a period of thirty days from October 9, a **BEAUTIFUL ¾-LIFE-SIZE INDIA INK AND CRAYON PORTRAIT** *FREE* to anyone who will bring or send them only 5s. and four consecutive coupons from *THE STORY TELLER.*

These portraits are of the finest artistic merit. They are absolutely permanent, being finished by the Air Brush, with indelible India Ink, making them more permanent than any of the old styles of portraits, and they will last a life-time.

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HOW CAN WE DO THIS?

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You will get an unheard-of bargain by availing yourself of this grand offer, and we are glad to be able to give it to you. We can copy from any photos, large or small, tin-types, or any kind of glass picture. We copy all pictures bust styles—head and shoulders only.

When Sending an Order inclose the picture you want copied in an envelope, and place your name and address on the back of the picture, and send the 5s. and four consecutive coupons from *THE STORY TELLER* to our paper, and you will receive the portrait copied for you as soon as possible. Have no fear of losing your small picture. It will be returned in as good order as received.

An example of the portrait we offer to give you can be seen at the Offices of P.W.

Address:—PORTRAITS,
Pearson's Weekly Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C

Apartments to Let.

It must be said that Anatole Pluchin was on the eve of getting married. These things may happen to anybody, and I don't mention the fact in order to ask your pity on his behalf, because his *fiancée* was a charming girl. Her name was Andree—delightful name! She was blonde. She was twenty years and seven months old—attractive age! She belonged to a family that was worthy of all respect—a fact to be considered.

That rogue Anatole! He knew the young girl was in love with him—madly in love with him. Had she not confessed to him that she would die rather than marry another? I know well that these things are often said and rarely executed. But in this case, although Andree was a blonde, she was the owner of an energetic and decided character.

Doubtless it was this strong temperament that prevented her parents from making any objections, and placing any obstacles in her way. It was no use talking to Andree!

"You know, mamma," she repeated again and again, "I want this matter to be finished quickly."

"But, my dear child, there are certain delays and certain formalities——"

"The delays can be hurried."

"That is true."

"And the formalities can be simplified."

"I have no objections, dear, if it will give you pleasure."

"Then, mamma, let us consider the engagement as settled."

"Settled! Your lover has only exchanged a very few words with your father."

"You know that my father does what you wish; let us waste no more time discussing it. I shall be married on the 10th of next month. Let us start the campaign."

"Start the campaign? What do you mean?"

"Find apartments."

"Yes; but——"

"To-morrow morning, then, we will start out. To-morrow, directly after breakfast, for apartments are sometimes difficult to find. Now, mamma, let me give you a kiss, you are so good."

She spoke the truth. Her mother was an excellent creature, and Anatole Pluchin was—well, his mother, her future mother-in-law, was of the kind that are nowadays seldom to be found.

The day following, at the appointed hour, Andree was ready to attack Paris and ransack it from end to end in her endeavours to find the nest—that is, the apartments—of her dreams. Her valiant mother was prepared to accompany her. The poor old woman had burned her throat with her coffee, and had nearly choked herself over the sugar at the bottom of the cup.

Young and inexperienced Andree little knew what a terrible thing it is to hunt for rooms in Paris; to climb up dozens and dozens of steps, and to undergo the searching questioning of zealous *concierges* and indiscreet *portieres*.

After an hour and a half of this exercise, the unfortunate girl was exhausted. And her mother! She followed her daughter, puffing like a grampus, and dragging her legs after her as if they were logs of heavy timber. "Ouf! Ouf! Ouf!"

Then at length: "Mamma, look at that pretty house with a view from the back windows over the gardens. Let us ask the price. I have an idea that it will be just the thing."

The price was just what the girl had judged reasonable for herself and her future husband.

"Let us go upstairs," cried Andree, who was delighted. "We can see over it, can we not?" she asked the *concierge*.

"Certainly, mademoiselle."

"Is any one living here now?" asked the mother.

"A young widow, madame."

"Ah!" remarked the mother, "and doubtless she wishes to leave a house that has painful memories for her."

A flashily dressed girl opened the door in answer to their ring.

"These ladies desire to see the apartments," explained the *concierge*.

The girl made a remark in a low voice, that escaped the others' ears. It was accompanied by an expressive shrug of the shoulders.

"*Entrez!*" she said aloud.

Andree and her mother walked in. Everything most comfortable. Quite a discovery, in fact. The furniture was commodious and elegant, and placed each piece in the corner where it suited best. And the appointments! And the cupboards! And the kitchen! And the arrangement of the light! The visitors were completely charmed.

As they turned a corner of the corridor the mother looked in the direction of Andree, and said:

"Andree, I think it must be your good star that guided us here."

But she stopped suddenly.

"Why, where are you, Andree? Where can she have gone to? Andree!"

A distant and sorrowful cry came in answer.

"Andree! What's the matter?" cried her mother alarmed.

This is what had happened. Andree, inquisitive little girl that she was, had turned down a passage, and suddenly opened a door. She was curious to see what the room was like.

The door, it so happened, was that of a private boudoir. Inside, as she stood, pretty as a fairy, in the doorway, she saw a velvet sofa. On the sofa she saw, half reclining, a very pretty young widow with black eyes and a demurely sweet face. Kneeling on the soft Turkish rug beside her, with his hand upon his heart and an expression of eternal love upon his face, was a young man.

Andree heard no words, but the noise of opening the door caused the young man to spring to his feet and face her.

"Ah! *ma foi!* Andree!"

It was indeed Anatole.

* * * * * *

Andree possessed a resolute character, as we know. She never saw Anatole again, and the amount the courts granted her for breach of promise of marriage is not exactly known.

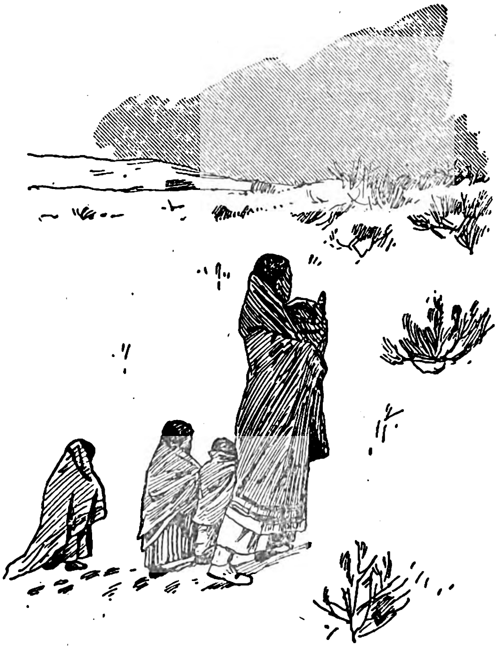
In this way a mother-in-law who was anxious to do all she could for her son-in-law only succeeded in bringing about results that were a hundred times worse than the most bitter hostilities.

Such is the irony of fate, and doubtless it was best for the happiness of *la belle* Andree. B. S. K.

ZEE-WEE

I.

Zee-Wee and her twin sister, Wauska, resembled each other like two peas. They were the daughters of the Dacotah chief, Don't Know How. Their mother was named Minona, and she was the wife of her husband. Altogether, she was the prettiest squaw in the village, and there were those who declared that her match for beauty was not to be found in the whole Dacotah nation. Much was said, too, about the exorbitant price that was paid for her—being a fleet horse, a six-barreled Colt revolver, and three blankets. She was, indeed, a woman of rare worth.



Wandered away to the nearest Government agency.

Twins were infrequent in the Dacotah nation, and Don't Know How was none too well pleased when Minona presented him with two girls. One of them always seemed to him superfluous, but he could never decide which, as he had no way of telling them apart. Even the mother had her doubts as to which was Zee-Wee and which Wauska, until they were four or five years old, and the dominant spirit of the one differentiated her from her gentle sister.

It may have been Wauska who was the enterprising one, and Zee-Wee who imitated her; but the mother, either by chance or guided by a deeper instinct, decided differently. The name Zee-Wee gradually attached itself to the adventurous maiden, and the shy and docile sister became identified as Wauska.

Two more children were born to Minona in the course of years, and they were both girls. Then Don't Know How became seriously alarmed, and took unto himself two more wives. These were much cheaper than Minona had been, so he could afford to indulge himself.

But when they had borne each a man-child, and felt their position assured, they leagued themselves against the favourite and drove her out of the tepee. There was a hot battle outside, and the chief sat calmly and looked on, while Minona was beaten, scratched, torn, and knocked down, and trampled upon.

It was not his habit, he said, to mix in woman's business. Even when Minona arose, bruised and bleeding from the snow, he sat imperturbable, with crossed legs and made no motion to help her. Her children were thrown out to her, one after another, by her victorious rivals, and she picked up the youngest in her arms, and gathering the rest around her, wandered away to the nearest Government agency. There the doctor put plasters and salves upon her wounds, and she was well cared for.

The white folks were kind to her, and she was warm and comfortable. When, therefore, the missionary asked her for one of her little girls, promising to have her educated like the pale-faces, she pushed over to him the one she believed to be Wauska; and it was not until the next day she discovered that it was Zee-Wee with whom she had parted. She wanted to rectify her mistake (for Zee-Wee, in spite of the confusion of identity, was the apple of her eye,) but it was too late. Zee-Wee had been sent with a dozen other children to the Lyleham Institute, in charge of the missionary.

The next day Don't Know How came to the agency and demanded his wife. She was reluctant to go with him, until he guaranteed her revenge and protection. But back she went at last; and she sat perfectly unmoved, with her feet drawn up under her, while the two cantankerous wives got their beating.

She was not a little afraid that she might be called to account for parting with Zee-Wee without his consent. But her mind was soon at rest. A month elapsed before her husband referred to Zee-Wee's absence, and when she explained, somewhat timidly, what had become of her, he only said, "How," and never referred to her again.

II.

Fourteen years had passed, and Zee-Wee was twenty years old. She was the cleverest Indian girl that had ever been graduated from the Lyleham Institute. During the last years of her stay she had acted as a teacher to the younger children of her race; and she had been so successful in this work that there was a prospect of her obtaining a permanent engagement.

But Zee-Wee's heart yearned for her own people. Her mission, she said, was to spread the light of civilisation among the Dacotahs. Her father, the chief, of whom she had scarcely the dimmest recollection, appeared to her fancy as a stern and noble savage, sage and eloquent, of kingly mien and bearing, ruling his tribe with paternal despotism.

She would go back to this father, who must have sorely missed her during all these years, and would be a daughter to him in very truth, guessing his desires and ministering to his wants. She felt herself as a princess of the forest, and there was something touchingly pathetic in her situation which appealed mightily to her. Not once, but a hundred times, had the teachers of the Institute impressed upon her and her fellow pupils their solemn responsibility to their savage kinsmen. They were to be the torch-bearers of light in the dusk of the primeval woods, and the future of the whole Indian race (which otherwise would be doomed to extinction) depended upon them.

There was among the teachers at the Lyleham Institute an enthusiastic young lady named Marion Gallaudet, who had conceived a passionate friendship for Zee-Wee. She was one of those restless women who are always hungering for a mission, and professing a great contempt for those who have none.

Zee-Wee was not deep enough, perhaps, to be aware that she herself presented herself to Miss Gallaudet in the light of a mission. Far less could she make allowance for the exaggeration of a mind thus constituted. It was to Miss Gallaudet's unwearied efforts that she owed her own mission—her resolution to devote her life to the redemption of her tribe from the degradation of savagery.

Many and many an evening she sat with Miss Gallaudet in her neat and pretty little room, weaving the romances of their futures, embellishing them with fresh touches, borrowed from Cooper, Chateaubriand, and Longfellow.

Zee-Wee would marry, of course, an Indian chief, and the more savage the better, in order that she might lift him up to her level, or, as her friend phrased it, permeate his savage nature with the sweetness of her pure womanhood. Her instructress, too, had made up her mind to bestow her precious self upon a proud son of the forest; and while she sat in her luxurious easy chair, toasting her toes before her fire, would descant in enraptured tones upon the soul-expanding freedom of woods and prairies, and the wholesome discipline of hardship.

III.

The Indian village, consisting of forty or fifty wigwams, was pitched about four miles from the Government agency. It was early in September, and the heat was oppressive.

Everybody seemed asleep. Even the dogs were disinclined to stir; only now and then one of them rose, with lolling tongue, stretched himself lazily, and after a sleepy survey of the surroundings, lay down again with his head between his forepaws. Smoke rose only from a single wigwam, over the entrance to which was an unpainted board, bearing an inscription in lamp black:

D. K. HOW, TRADER.

The article which D. K. How traded in (although only surreptitiously) seemed to have affected his powers of locomotion; for he lay snoring heavily in the hot sun in front of his tepee in a place and position which he scarcely would have chosen with deliberate intent.

The sound of hoof-beats upon the prairie startled the dogs, and half-a-dozen of them, conquering their lethargy, began to bark in a languidly perfunctory fashion. The hoof-beats came nearer, and some more dogs awoke and joined in the chorus of salutation. A well-grown and rather good-looking Indian girl put her head out of the opening of D. K. How's wigwam to ascertain the cause of the disturbance.

What she saw was a young woman of her own race, accompanied by a sergeant in uniform from the Government post. She rode on a side-saddle, and was dressed like a white lady, with shoes on her feet and a straw hat with feathers on her head. There was something dainty and neat about her which greatly impressed the occupant of the wigwam.

"Do you know where I can find the chief, Don't Know How?" she asked, vigorously smoothing down her skirts (for she was not in riding habit) and fidgeting with a parasol which she had apparently been using as a whip.

The savage maiden stared from the sergeant to her questioner, as if she did not comprehend.

"Why, miss," the sergeant exclaimed, as he caught sight of the sleeping figure at his horse's feet, "that's him; that's Don't Know How."

Zee-Wee, who had carefully backed her pony in order to avoid stepping on the sleeper, leapt from the saddle, and stood long regarding him with a look of anxious scrutiny.

"Is he ill?" she asked.

"No; only drunk," replied the sergeant reassuringly.

Zee-Wee had told herself many times on the way that she must not pitch her expectations too high; she had tried to prepare herself for a possible disappointment. But how far were all her imaginings from the reality that confronted her! With a sinking heart she stooped over the prostrate man, and gently shaking him, cried in his ear: "Father! It is I—Zee-Wee—who have come back to you."

With an embroidered handkerchief (which was a present from Miss Gallaudet) she brushed the mosquitoes from his face, and wiped away the beads of perspiration from his forehead. She could not repress a little shiver of disgust at the alcoholic fumes which enveloped him. She saw his heavy, drunken eyes open with a look of sullen stupor; but she bravely conquered her impulse to run, and, kneeling at his side, she repeated, sweetly:

"Father! It is I—Zee-Wee. Don't you know me—Zee-Wee, your daughter?"

Don't Know How gave a savage growl, as if he resented being disturbed, then raised himself into a sitting posture, and began to rub his eyes with the backs of his grimy hands. The sergeant, who had lost all patience with the brute, gave him a kick, and cried: "Get up there, quick. You'll get the jimjams if you go to sleep in the sun, like a pig."

The chief gave another sullen growl, and, discarding Zee-Wee's proffered hand, struggled into an approximately perpendicular position. Thus he remained for a minute or more, swaying slightly to the right and to the left, doubtful whether to trust his legs in an experiment of locomotion. His features wore a meditative air, which made the sergeant laugh and Zee-Wee shudder. The former, as his presence definitely penetrated Don't Know How's consciousness, aroused in his mind a dim suspicion. Pulling himself together, he reeled past him, and, making a random dive for the entrance to the tepee, disappeared in the dusk within.

A greyish pallor suffused Zee-Wee's brown cheeks. Her breath came in spasmodic gasps, her eyes dilated, and from her lips issued a half-stifled sound, which was half a moan and half a sigh. She looked forlorn, forsaken, bitterly disillusionised. The sergeant felt sorry for her, and remarked, by way of consolation:

"Could have told you before, miss, that that Indian trash wasn't worth looking up. Get into the saddle again, and we'll ride back to the agency."

He held out his hand to swing her into the saddle, but she stood gazing at him dismally, and made no motion to accept his offer. Her limbs seemed numb, her faculties paralysed. She was afraid to think, and bit her lips in the effort to keep the thoughts at bay.

Presently the same face that ten minutes ago had obscured the opening reappeared, and the same comely Indian girl, in scant attire, stood eyeing Zee-Wee with an air of timid deprecation. One of her shoulders was bare, and a much dilapidated garment of some cheap striped stuff hung, loosely suspended, from the other. The dull fatigue in Zee-Wee's glance suddenly vanished at the sight of her; a new emotion flared up and visibly struggled in her features.

"Wauska?" she asked, a little awkwardly. "Are you my twin sister, Wauska?"

She was obviously afraid of being rebuffed, and therefore strove to restrain her agitation.

"Wauska — yes. Me Wauska," answered the other, nodding vigorously.

"I am Zee-Wee. You know Zee-Wee?"

"Me know Zee-Wee—yes."

"Where is my mother, Wauska?" she asked tremulously.

Wauska looked blank, and only nodded vaguely, when the question was repeated.

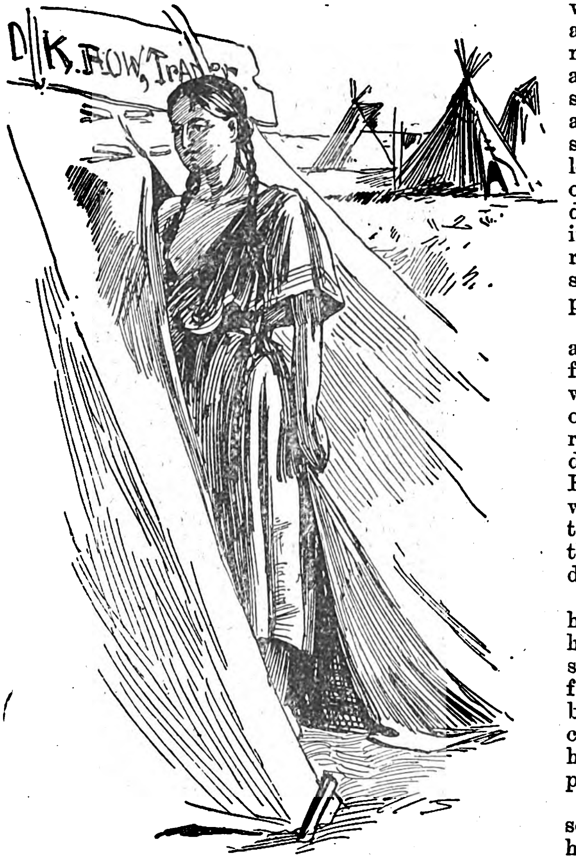
"Where is Minona—*my* mother—*your* mother?" Zee-Wee reiterated slowly, and with much emphasis on each syllable. Wauska, without a shadow of emotion, turned to the sergeant, addressing to him a few strangely guttural sounds in her own language.

"Wauska says that her mother has been dead for many years," explained the latter in English. "She wants to know whether her sister has forgotten her Indian speech."

"I am sorry, Wauska, that I have," wailed Zee-Wee.

An oppressive sense of helplessness, of boundless impotence and weariness, crept over her like a cold chill, which was now followed by a dull, stinging pain in the region of the chest. Her heart felt heavy as lead. She was too sad to weep. Should she return with the sergeant to the agency, and weakly abandon her mission? Her face betrayed to him but little emotion, and when, to precipitate the issue, he mounted his horse, she still stood irresolute.

"Well, Zee-Wee," he said, seizing the bridle of her pony, "toss up a penny. Head, Indian; tail, white."



Wauska.

Suiting the action to his words, he flung a coin into the air; but the horse, mistaking the meaning of the gesture, backed and stepped on the coin. "Sure it was tail," he cried; "come along, now, or you'll regret it."

He looked at her with cheery encouragement; but, as she slowly shook her head, he whipped up both horses and rode away.

IV.

As soon as the sergeant was out of sight, Wauska stepped out from the tepee, and, with true Indian stolidity, stood staring at her sister. It was a summer wigwam, about twenty feet wide, and surrounded by a raised platform, the width of which was about six feet. Two mongrel dogs, which had been viewing Zee-Wee with suspicion, now came up and smelt her, and, having made sure of her respectability, withdrew, peevishly stretched themselves, yawned, and lay down to resume their slumber in the shadow of the lodge. Two naked children of five or six years had also discovered Zee-Wee, and stood in the middle of the road, regarding her, like images of stone, with imperturbable composure.

The sense of oppression, anxiety—nay, of helpless fright—which had hovered with its icy breath on the outskirts of her mind, now reasserted itself, and a sudden faintness came over her. Her knees tottered; her head was in a whirl. She staggered towards the platform where the dogs were lying, and sat down on the edge of it.

Now that she had cut off her retreat, she felt as if she had surrendered herself to some terrible unknown power from which no mercy was to be expected. Again she clasped her head tightly in her hands, and strove desperately to conquer her fear.

Looking up, she saw Wauska seated on the ground before her; but her placid features evinced neither curiosity nor interest, far less sympathy or affection. Her black, bead-like eyes glittered uneasily, as if she, too, had some apprehension of danger. For fully an hour they sat thus, silently gazing at each other, each trying to explore the other's soul.

Meanwhile the shadow of the tepee had swung round until the platform was exposed to the full glare of the sun. Zee-Wee arose. She had fought the battle to the bitter end. Her mind was clear and calm. "Wauska," she said, "I'm going to speak to my father."

The uneasy light in Wauska's eyes brightened, and she sprang up and grasped her sister's hand.

"Zee-Wee, no go," she ejaculated, in a breathless staccato. "Chief drunk now—Zee-Wee wait! Chief sober——"

"No," Zee-Wee answered, turning her unfaltering eyes upon her astonished sister; "I must go now."

The old heroism had come back to her. Doubt and weakness had fled. She could have gone to the stake unflinchingly, cheerfully; torture and death had lost their terrors.

Don't Know How had awakened from his drunken sleep, and sat peevishly scratching his head, when his daughter confronted him.

"I have come to stay with you, father," she said with lofty serenity; "I have been away from you for fourteen years. Now I want to be a help and comfort to you, if you will let me."

The chief sat with his immobile face peering into the dusk, in which the figure of his daughter dimly defined itself against the uncovered opening.

"How!" he exclaimed, whether by way of greeting or as an expression of surprise she could not determine—"how!"

"You surely remember Zee-Wee, your daughter?" she continued, in a voice of entreaty—"Zee-Wee, Minona's child, who went away with the white missionary to be educated? Now she has come back, and wants to teach her Indian kin."

"Zee-Wee come back—Minona's papoose," he jerked forth.

The memory of the half-forgotten incident was obviously revived, and a vague expression of intelligence passed over his features.

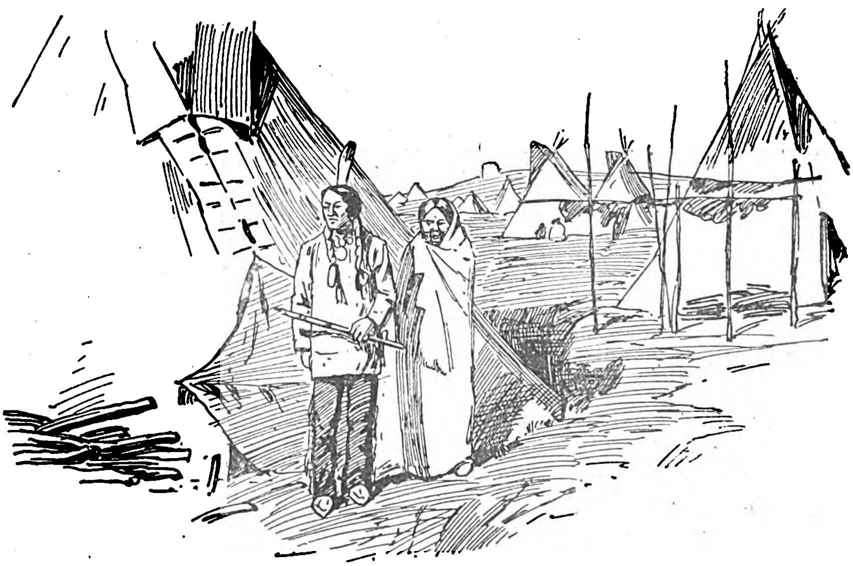
"Yes, yes," cried Zee-Wee, delighted; "and you are glad to see Zee-Wee again—glad that she has come back?"

"Wehakha not like Zee-Wee. Wehakha beat Zee-Wee; Wehakha drive Zee-Wee away," he observed, after a meditative pause.

"Wehakha?"

She was about to add: "Who is Wehakha?" when it dawned upon her that Wehakha was probably her father's wife. The presence of a stepmother, and especially one who might be expected to beat her, was not an agreeable prospect to Zee-Wee, but she conquered herself and answered, in her sweetest tones: "But my father will protect Zee-Wee. Zee-Wee will not provoke the anger of Wehakha."

The chief plainly regarded this as a problematic proposition. He vouchsafed no reply, but began to scratch his head once more, with a look of sulky preoccupation. The heat within the wigwam and the foul odour which pervaded the air made Zee-Wee anxious to terminate the interview, and she seized this opportunity to withdraw and rejoin Wauska outside.



"Crooked Gun—that his squaw—Small Pigeon."

V.

Zee-Wee had been five or six hours in her father's wigwam before food was set before her. When, tortured by hunger, she had asked Wauska about the time for dinner, she had learned that there was no definite hour for any meal, but that people ate when they were hungry. It was at six or seven o'clock in the evening, when the sun was near setting, that food was offered her, consisting of hominy and dried beef. As the rank odour inside the tepee almost nauseated her, she begged leave to sit on the outer platform, and, as her father nodded his head in token of assent, she made her escape as quickly as possible, and with difficulty forced down the unappetising morsels.

It was while she was thus occupied that she became aware of a broad-shouldered, squat young Indian, who was standing before the opening of the opposite lodge, regarding her with the sort of attention with which a cat watches the movements of a bird up in a tree.

There was something hard, wooden, impenetrable in its stolid inexpressiveness, and yet there seemed to be lurking in his eyes a feline alertness which made her shiver. He wore trousers with ornamental fringes, and a shirt which came down to his knees.

A young squaw, who looked cowed and frightened, came out of the wigwam and spoke to him, and Zee-Wee seemed to feel that he was inquiring about her. She heard repeatedly the words: "How, how!" and, though she could understand nothing, she yet listened with a nervous tension, as if her own fate were involved in that conversation. An insidious chill stole over her, and her former visions of frenzied dances, accompanied by savage yells, tortures, and agonised screams, returned to her.

Zee-Wee was interrupted in her reflections by Wauska, who came out and again seated herself on the ground in front of her, with her feet pulled up on the right side. The two sisters gazed at each other regretfully, each yearning to confide in the other. There was tenderness in Zee-Wee's glance, and in Wauska's a dawning light of admiration and half-embarrassed affection. She extended her hand repeatedly with the desire to touch the little gold cross which depended from a string of amber beads about Zee-Wee's neck; but each time her embarrassment got the better of her courage, and she slowly withdrew her hand, with a smile of sheepish deprecation.

"Wauska," said Zee-Wee, when this pantomime had continued for several minutes, "who is the man that stands before the wigwam opposite? Tell me his name, please."

She made a slight motion with her head to indicate the direction.

"Crooked Gun," answered Wauska.

"Crooked Gun—is that his name?"

"Crooked Gun—that his squaw—Small Pigeon," she added, by way of amplification.

Whether Crooked Gun divined that he was the subject of discussion, or he had a definite errand, he presently crossed the road and paused in front of the sisters. He addressed some questions in the Indian tongue to Wauska, glancing sideways at Zee-Wee, whose heart began to beat with so tumultuous a throb that she wondered whether he could not hear it.

Twice she lifted her grave eyes to his face with a mute appeal, but each time she recoiled from the sight, and the pitiless immobility of his features again chilled her blood with fear. It was especially his low, beetling brow and his evil, thin-lipped mouth that repelled her; while his narrow, gleaming eyes, surlily fixed upon her, filled her with a nameless apprehension.

When Wauska had satisfied his curiosity, Crooked Gun slouched his heavy shoulders forward, and, turning upon his heel, entered the wigwam. Instantly the conversation, which had recently flagged, revived, and the harsh croak of Wehakha's voice was heard above the quiet deliberations of the men. A dull flush of excitement glowed upon Wauska's dusky cheeks, and her eyes began to glitter with an unnatural brightness.

"What is it, Wauska?" asked Zee-Wee anxiously.

Wauska responded with a lively mimic injunction to keep silent. She sat immovable, with her hand to her ear, a dilated stare in her fixed bead-like eyes.

"Oh, Wauska, Wauska, what is it?" cried Zee-Wee, with a thrill of panic. "Does he want to kill me?"

"Crooked Gun—he marry Zee-Wee," Wauska replied, in a whispered staccato.

"Oh, no, no, Wauska! It isn't possible! He has a wife already."

"Indian have two wife—three wife—as much wife he like," Wauska obligingly explained.

"But he doesn't know me, Wauska. He has never seen me until to-day. You are mistaken, surely. It is you he wants to marry."

Wauska was too much absorbed in listening to pay any heed to these exclamations; and it was not until her sister had repeated them in a voice of tremulous entreaty that she observed, placidly: "Crooked Gun no marry Wauska."

Zee-Wee sat long—stunned, bewildered. She felt wounded in her pride, revolted in her sense of propriety, outraged in her womanhood. Should she permit herself to be disposed of like a chattel to the first savage who made a bid for her? She writhed with an anguish of humiliation at the thought of all the sentiments she had wasted upon this father who was now bartering her away for a horse, or a rifle, or half-a-dozen blankets. She could hear within the bargaining of the two men and the occasional croaking of Wehakha, who was either objecting to the price or urging its acceptance.

There are no wounds more stinging than those of vanity. Zee-Wee's self-esteem shrank woefully during that torturing half-hour. She felt in one moment paltry, cowed, and insignificant; but in the next wrath came to her assistance, and her courage rebounded. She would fight to the last ditch. She would never, never, never submit.

VI.

The next morning Zee-Wee was curtly informed by her father that she was to marry Crooked Gun that very day; and she learnt incidentally from Wauska that the price her suitor was to pay for her was a Winchester rifle, a powder-horn, and five blankets. He had ridden to the agency at an early hour for the purpose of procuring the rifle by theft or by barter, and he was expected back at noon.

Zee-Wee walked about, dumbly wringing her hands in tearless torture and shivering apprehension. She was well aware that she was watched, and that an attempt at escape would be futile. She implored and entreated her father to be permitted to return to the Government post, and pledged herself to send him handsome presents from the Institute, where she would be able to earn money; but he evidently distrusted promises extorted by fear, preferring one modest bird in the hand to ten gorgeous ones in a very remote bush.

It was two hours past noon when Zee-Wee's suitor presented himself in front of the wigwam, followed by his squaw, Small Pigeon, who was carrying the purchase price of her future rival. The rifle was duly delivered, and was found to be in good order; likewise the five blankets; but the powder-horn was missing. Crooked Gun offered some excuse, asserting that it was an oversight, and promised that, if the bride was sent to his wigwam, he would make good the deficiency on the morrow.

But Don't Know How was not to be fooled by such subterfuges. He insisted upon the literal fulfilment of the contract; and when the brave began to bargain afresh, declaring that he had but one powder-horn, which he could not spare, the chief returned the accepted goods, and gave him twenty-four hours in which to meet his obligations, or to take the consequences.

The heat had grown sultrier and more oppressive during the afternoon, and a fantastic play of heat-lightning was fitfully illuminating the western horizon. The sun had set in a sanguinary blaze of colours; the clouds sent long phantasmal arms towards the zenith, and the first premonitory mutterings of thunder were heard on the outskirts of the wide plain.

Gradually, as the dark curtain spread northward, southward, westward, a desolating wind began to wander over the prairie, making all sorts of aimless excursions, marked by the bending of the sage-brush and the faint whistling of the arid stalks. A few hesitating drops of rain fell, big and heavy; and in a trice the heavens were blotted out in a mighty downpour, which swept with a splendid impetuosity across the sun-parched plain.

Zee-Wee was sitting, with her ear pressed against the wall of the wigwam, listening to the rhythmic roar of the storm and the wild rhetoric of the thunder. With one eye she was also observing Wehakha, who was squatting before the fire, shelling corn, while with the other she was keeping watch of the door, through the crack of which the rain was beating in, forming a large, slowly widening puddle.

Though this puddle seemed for the moment a matter of much interest to Zee-Wee, it was merely her external sense which was occupied in its contemplation. Out of her soul there arose an anxious query, which was repeated and repeated with a quivering intensity, until it became half mechanical, and she had to rouse herself again in order to realise that happiness or misery—life and death—depended upon it. She had spent the whole afternoon in tremulous excitement, asking herself with a wearisome reiteration: "Will he come? Will he give up the powder-horn?"

It was too ludicrously absurd, and yet tragically humiliating, that her fate, in this moment, depended upon a powder-horn.

It was three hours after sunset. The chief and his sons were snoring peacefully in their corners, and, beside Zee-Wee, only Wehakha and Wauska were awake. The fire in the middle of the wigwam was flaring up fitfully, only to lapse again into a slumberous flapping about the glowing coals. The raindrops which fell through the open smoke-hole sizzled in the smouldering embers, and the smoke writhed tortuously along the floor.

Then all of a sudden there was a shriek—a loud, wild, frenzied shriek. Something dashed down the smoke-hole—a fierce, phantasmal something—whirling live coals and cinders in a maddening dance through the air; then all was still. The fire was out. Darkness and confusion filled the wigwam. It took a long while before a light could be struck, and, when the fire once more blazed up, the chief discovered that Zee-Wee was gone. Wrapping a blanket about him, he was about to plunge out into the night, but bumped in the doorway against Crooked Gun, who stood, dripping wet from top to toe, triumphantly lifting above his head a powder-horn.

Without a word, Don't Know How pushed past him and ran towards the end of the village, where the horses were grazing. Wehakha roused her sons and bade them join in the search; and Wauska, smothering a shout of joy, slipped out of the door and was swallowed up in the abysmal gloom.

She ran a few steps, and then flung herself flat on the ground. She could hear the frightened trampling of the horses, and concluded that her father and Crooked Gun were having trouble in capturing their ponies, for it was not the rhythmic gallop of one or two animals, but the continuous trooping hither and thither of a panic-stricken herd.

Cautiously she raised her head again and called: "Zee-Wee!" She knew her sister could not be far away, and she knew, too, that unless she could find her and show her the way to the agency she would surely be captured. Wauska crawled along for some minutes on hands and feet, feeling the soil with her fingers, and finally found the path. A momentary flash on the horizon revealed to her, under a clump of sage-brush, a crouching form, which moved and half rose up, only to cower again in helpless terror.

"Zee-Wee," she cried, flinging herself down upon the prostrate form, "Zee-Wee!"

"Wauska," screamed Zee-Wee, clutching her in a smothering embrace. "You will not betray me?"

"No. Wauska help Zee-Wee."

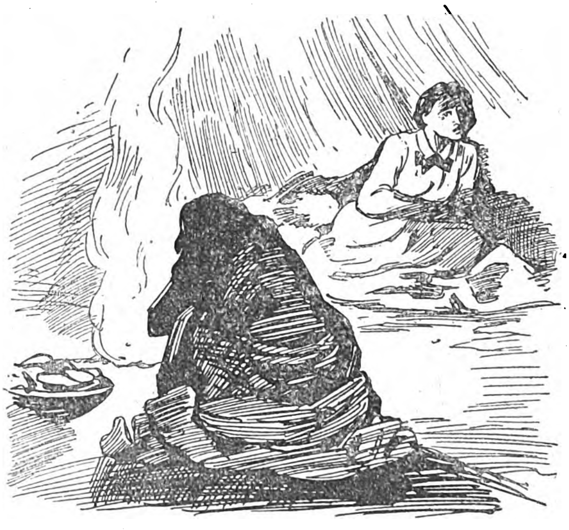
And, lifting her up by main force, she started forward again, trusting to an instinct in her feet rather than to intelligence. "Zee-Wee, hurry," she whispered, breathlessly. "Don't Know How hunt Zee-Wee."

She paused to listen for the sound of hoof-beats; but, hearing none, she broke again into a swift, impetuous flight, which took small note of obstacles. The arm which was wound about Zee-Wee's waist was scratched and bleeding, and often her bare feet slid over toads and vermin which the rain had lured out from their holes. There was something in this rapid, sure, silent run which, instead of exhausting Zee-Wee, by reviving her courage restored her vigour.

She was about to open her mouth to speak, when suddenly she heard voices behind her, and the hoof-beats of horses. But before a sound escaped her lips the heavens were rent from zenith to horizon by one fierce, straight, terrifying blast of flame, followed in the same instant by an ear-splitting crash—dead, flat, stupefying.

Wauska had dropped to the ground like a stone, pulling her sister with her. For two or three minutes she lay tremulously still, while the aerial artillery overhead discharged a series of deafening salvoes. Suddenly Wauska, who had been cautiously groping with her fingers, exclaimed: "Me help Zee-Wee. Wauska hide Zee-Wee quick."

And, giving her an admonitory nudge, she crawled eagerly forward in the dark intervals between the flashes of lightning, dropping quickly upon the ground at the first hint of an illumination. It was a hazardous experiment, and not always successful; but she had reason to hope that they were yet undetected, when, at the end of five minutes' laborious progress, they tumbled into a deep hollow. It was an excavation recently made by a party of emigrants that had crossed the plains, when a season of bad weather had prevented their travelling. It was more than half full of water, but up under the edge of the projecting turf there was a dry and comparatively sheltered nook, into which the two girls shiveringly wedged themselves.


Zee-Wee was sitting, with her ear pressed against the wall of the wigwam.

Through the perpetual rumble of the thunder they could distinctly hear the shouts of men and the galloping hither and thither of horses. They recognised plainly their father's voice, and that of Crooked Gun calling to him from the distance. They seemed all to have taken different directions, beating systematically over the prairie, so that no inch of ground should escape them.

Zee-Wee held her breath; she heard her heart hammering in her throat. She was by turns burning hot and shivering. Nearer and nearer came the hoof-beats; a horse whinnied frantically; another answered far away in the gloom.

Suddenly Wauska became aware of two figures on horseback at the edge of the pool; it was her father and Zee-Wee's discarded wooer. Swiftly she withdrew her head, and, clutching Zee-Wee in her arms, shut her eyes tightly. She could hear the turbulent heart beat within the breast that was pressed against her own, and almost the surging of the hot blood as it sped through the veins with the impetus of fright.

Zee-Wee knew by Wauska's abrupt movement, and by the tightening of her clutch, that they were on the verge of being discovered. She heard the sound of voices, but could comprehend nothing. An icy chill of terror rippled down her spine; a sound of rushing water filled her ears. She expected every moment to feel a rude grip on her arm—nay, she felt it again and again, and shuddered.

It seemed an infinitely long time she lay thus. The sound of hoof-beats which dimly penetrated her sense receded farther and farther. Then she felt a chill stream of water steal down her back, and she had a sensation that her hair was full of earth.

"Are they gone, Wauska?" she whispered.

"Zee-Wee, wait!"

It must have been fully half an hour before she dared repeat her query. Then Wauska cautiously descended into the pool, the water of which reached to her hips, and, creeping up to the edge, endeavoured to take a survey of the prairie. But it was now pitch dark, except for an occasional faint flash of lightning on the western sky-line.

"Zee-Wee, come," she said, and, grasping her sister's hand, she pulled her up the steep bank.

"Why did they go away?" asked Zee-Wee, when the fresh air restored her respiration.

"Crooked Gun, he say 'Water.'"

"They didn't think we could be there, because the excavation was full of water."

As Wauska made no objection to this theory, Zee-Wee concluded that it must be correct.

They had walked perhaps two hours, groping their way over the trail; dropping flat upon the ground whenever their agitated vision conjured a horseman out of the gloom; hearing the dismal howls of the coyote, singly and in chorus; struggling with the pestiferous sage-brush which threatened to put out their eyes whenever they strayed from the path. But it was yet long before dawn, and Wauska, who had often heard of Indians being shot by sentries, did not dare approach the agency until morning.

Being weary unto death, they lay down at the roadside, watching the eastern horizon for the first flicker of the light. The rain had now ceased, and a chill night wind was careering over the prairie. In their wet clothes they shivered until their teeth chattered. Zee-Wee was numb all over, and the black insects that swarmed in the grass filled her with disgust. Another hour and another they waited. Then the east brightened into a translucent grey, which became faintly flushed with pink and green and saffron. The Government post (which was a dismounted fort) lay before them, with its large barn-like barracks inclosed within a tall adobe wall.

Wauska warily scanned the plain before she rose from her recumbent position. The chances were ten to one that their father, anticipating their intention, would attempt to intercept them before reaching the agency. While she was cautiously lifting her head, her large deerlike eyes suddenly dilated. She saw in the grey twilight two horses grazing scarcely a mile away. It was better to trust to the mercy of the sentries than to that of the Indians. Beckoning to Zee-Wee to follow her, she began to creep on hands and feet towards the gate. But scarcely fifty rods had they advanced when a wild yell rent the air, and the air seemed to throb with a vague, rhythmical thud.

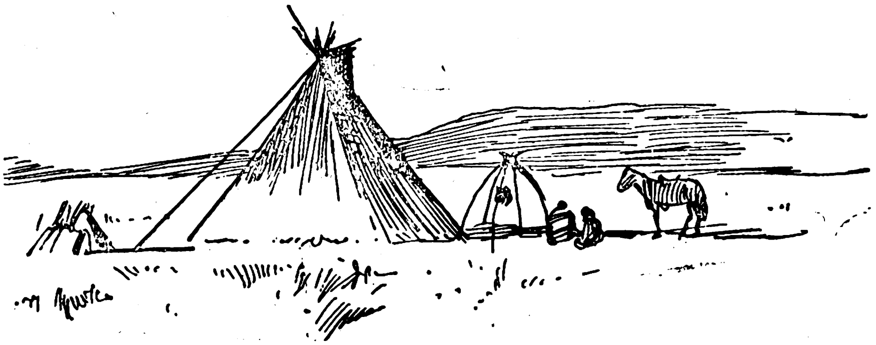
"Run, Zee-Wee, run!" cried Wauska, grabbing her sister's arm as she rose, and dashing forward in the direction of the gate. Faster they ran, and faster; the stronger sister's right arm wound about the weaker one's waist.

Nearer the hoof-beats came, nearer and nearer. Zee-Wee felt her knees tottering, and strange noises rang in her ears. But yet her feet moved with a wild, nightmarish speed; and it seemed as if, in spite of weakness and fright, they must keep on thus—running, running—faster and faster—for ever. Now she swayed, and was on the point of falling, but something upheld her; her breath stuck in her throat, and all things seemed blurred to her sight.

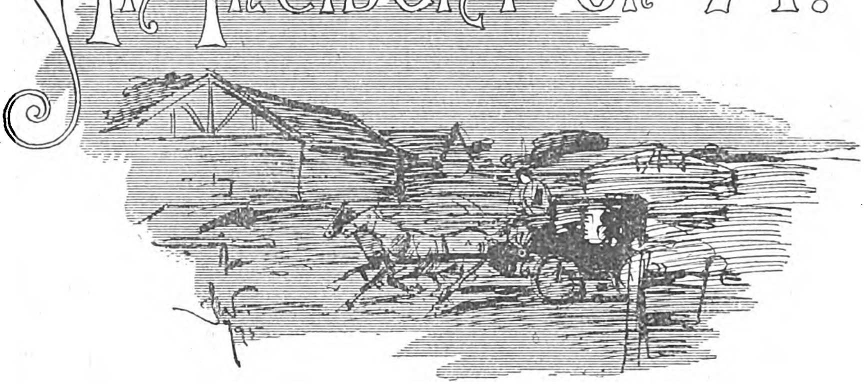
Wauska screamed aloud—screamed madly, frantically—to someone who appeared to be moving on the top of the wall; but behind her came a wilder scream—a terrible, blood-curdling yell—which made her heart stand still. The hoof-beats were now close behind her, or in front of her—all round her. But, just as they seemed about to trample her down, a great black something swung open, and she fell in a heap, with Wauska on the top of her, within the gate of the United States agency.

There was a great commotion about her; strange and familiar voices commingled, now very near, now far away. She was carried by strong men, and, when she opened her eyes, she lay upon a beautiful white bed. Someone was sitting at her side, gazing at her with affectionate solicitude. Her heart gave a bound of joy as she recognised Marion Gallaudet, and she flung herself weeping into her arms.

H. H. Boyesen.



An Incident of '71.



THE carriage was going at a terrific pace. The horses, unusually excited, dashed through the air, which whistled past their ears. Their hoofs resounded loudly on the hard, frozen road. The two carriage lanterns shone in the night like the glowing eyes of some huge, prehistoric monster.

The mad, furious course in the darkness had something strange about it; something mysterious, sinister, and all the more so, perhaps, that it was taking place in the terrible year when the Germans were in Alsace.

The carriage, like a vessel in distress on a raging sea, oscillated from left to right and from right to left.

When the vehicle, which had been flying down the slopes of Ottrot, raced through the village, passing like an express train the houses with their little low roofs, on which the moon cast a silvery light, the good women, suddenly frightened, made the sign of the cross with a trembling of the knees and a whispered prayer.

The fact was, the Prussians, for several weeks past, had been cruelly ravaging the country.

The flying carriage contained some German officers, who were the bearers of secret orders to S——.

"Faster, faster," they cried, whipping up the poor horses, which were already breathing fire and smoke out of their nostrils. The wretched driver, terrified, obeyed mechanically.

"*Tonnerre!*" he growled, "my horses will die when they reach their stable, if they do not break their necks going round one of these steep curves." But the strokes of the whip redoubled, and the dizzy course became still more reckless.

* * * * * *

That afternoon the enemy had taken possession of the village of Ottrot, and, as their custom was, had installed themselves in the people's homes.

Four officers were domiciled with the Mayor. They sat there in the middle of his best drawing-room, talking loudly, and smoking their long pipes of porcelain, while they dried their boots at the hot fire blazing in the grate.

Their unwilling host, a tall old man, with a white beard, served them with drinks as graciously as he could. His eye passed sadly from one to the other, his venerable head shaking melancholy, as if to say: "It is the right of the strongest; what can one do against a hundred?"

Perhaps his mind was dwelling on the past. Perhaps he was looking forward to revenge—thinking, it may be, of the time when his countrymen would be victorious, and offering mercy to these very officers, his guests.

He was recalled to the present by a gentle knock at the door, and almost immediately afterwards, he saw in the porch the tall powerful frame of Lux, who was the foreman of the Mayor's servants, and a model Hercules. He was agile as a deer and as strong as an ox, and could break a coin between his fingers quite as easily as he would break an egg shell.

The neck of a bull rose out of the flannel shirt carelessly fastened across the throat by a cotton necktie. He was a man terrible in anger, but in repose, gentle as a lamb, and as docile.

"What is the matter?"

"There is this the matter: another officer wants to quarter himself upon us here. Shall I strangle him?"

These words coming from such lips made one shudder.

"No, my old Lux, keep calm, that would do no good, and would only bring worse upon us. Let him in; he probably wishes to speak with his colleagues."

Lux did as his master told him, much against his inclination. It would have given him such a huge amount of pleasure to twist one of those German necks with his great sinewy fingers.

The new arrival burst into the drawing-room. The four Prussian officers uttered cries of surprise.

They rose at once in a body, and saluted with great respect the stranger who had come to disturb their peace.

"Be seated, and let us talk," said the new arrival, in German, and in a voice of command.

"You will set out at once," he said, "and take this sealed message to the Prince of X——, at S——," and he drew out of the pocket of his long military cloak, white with snow, a large white envelope, and handed it to one of the officers.

"Go, all four of you, and place yourselves at the disposition of the Prince. Further orders will be given to each of you later. You must get horses and carriage and start at once. Is it understood? Then hasten!"

Then, turning to the host, he said in French:

"Please accommodate these gentlemen with a carriage and two fresh horses. General's orders!"

Lux, who had remained standing at the door during this scene, anticipated his master's reply.

"It is well, Monsieur l'officier; you shall be accommodated as you desire."

He spoke in a peculiar tone of voice. Only his master, however, noticed it.

A mad thought had been born in his brain, something superhuman, preposterous. Anyone who could have read it in his mind would have been shocked, terror-stricken.

While a farm hand harnessed the horses to the carriage, Lux put a saddle on Barka, an Arab horse.

faithful animal which he loved and cared for himself with his own hands.

He spoke to it as he spoke to a friend, and the noble creature seemed to understand. When Lux mounted into the saddle he was trembling with joy.

A mysterious dialogue seemed to commence between the man and the horse, which, suddenly sending the sparks flying from beneath its four feet, vanished into the darkness like a phantom.

Barka, like some great mythological creature with wings, devoured space. His fine, nervous legs hardly seemed to touch the earth, and Lux kept him going at his utmost speed.

At length they stopped. Barka was white with foam, and Lux covered him with his cloak. He did not feel the cold, for the awful thought in his mind kept his whole body warm and tingling.

"It is yonder," he said to himself in a deep-voiced growl. "It is there that they are to perish."

At this point the road made a sudden turn, and apparently came to an abrupt end. As a matter of fact, however, it did not terminate, but continued in a steep, terrible slope. On the right was a dark mysterious wood, and on the left a deep and dizzy precipice such as are often seen by mountain roads.

Children were afraid to pass it by. The Gulf of Death, as it was called, had its legend. The old folk said that it was within its gloomy depths the monsters lived that ravaged the country at night.

"If my calculations are correct," said Lux in a low voice, "they will be here in ten minutes."

He tied Barka to a tree stem on the border of the wood, and a strange smile passed over his lips.

An extraordinary scene might then have been witnessed. Lux knelt down in this solitary, haunted spot, in the night time, and turned his face to heaven. It looked like a sinner asking forgiveness for his sins, rather than one planning an awful deed for the satisfaction of his rage and hate.

Not a sound was to be heard in the surrounding country. All seemed dead or asleep. Only a murmur of the wind in the pines.

Lux placed his ear to the ground, as the Indians do in the wilderness, and hearing a faint sound of hoofs in the distance, striking the hard ground, he raised his head. His face was transfigured!

"At last I shall have my revenge," he hissed.

Then he crouched down on his hands and knees and waited.

A few seconds more, and the carriage with the four German officers would be upon him.

He uttered a terrible cry of "*Vive la France!*" to which Barka replied with a joyful neigh.

The carriage, which had been approaching at tremendous speed, came to a sudden stop, as if arrested by an irresistible force, and remained there standing.

Lux had not moved an inch. He was not a man, but a stone wall.

He made a last and supreme effort, and raised himself upon his legs. Then with a terrific heave, he pushed over the dizzy brink, horses, carriage, and men.

An awful noise rose on the still night air. A sound of crashing, and of men and horses screaming. Then there was a silence, heavy, complete, tragic!

The man rose and peered over the edge into the black gulf of death. He saw nothing. Then he sprang into his saddle, and disappeared like a shadow into the night.

Le Vier.

The Love of His Life.

THE light crept dimly into the house. Romano's big eyes were bloodshot as he paced his room restlessly, beating his brow with his hands.

He paused, drew the blind aside, and peeped out at the glaring day. Venice bathed in sunshine looked black to Pietro Romano.

His gaze rested a moment on the church of S. Maria della Salute, erected to commemorate the passing away of the plague, then turned towards a golden ball, the vane of the Custom House, with a gilded figure of Fortune standing gracefully upon it. But even as he looked Fortune faded, flooded into fog by Pietro's tears. Faintly he discerned, as through a mist, the canal losing itself in a small arm of the sea. The blind fell back, and Romano was once again alone in the abode of death.

But two men below had noticed the bloodshot eyes peering round the blind.

"What is the matter with Pietro Romano?" asked one.

"He has lost his sweetheart-wife," replied the other.

They passed on.

Pietro went below. The air was heavy with the scent of flowers. He looked at the floral offerings of friends disdainfully.

"May they not be taken up?" asked a timid voice.

Pietro turned angrily to the servant. "No flowers shall lie on her coffin but mine."

Then he remembered that his wife's mother arrived from Paris that morning to look for the last time on Juliette.

Pietro hastened upstairs.

She had left a shower of lilies, a cross, and three wreaths on his wife's bed. The wreaths were from her three sisters. He seized the flowers in a frenzy, flung them away and trampled them under foot.

"Only mine," he muttered fiercely, "every blossom in Venezia, but from me, from me!"

Pietro returned to the foot of the bed, having drawn back the covering from the dead face, and feasted his eyes on the wondrous beauty of Juliette's marble features. How suddenly the end had come! Three days ago she walked with him on the Piazza San Marco. He could hear even then, in the presence of that still, stiff effigy, the murmuring of voices, and the music of the bands borne over the waters. For two days he had neither slept nor eaten. On the third his wife was dead.

He dropped his head in his hand. Sleep crept over him. He dreamt that he descended into the dark prisons of the condemned. Juliette was alive and well, lounging in a gondola, hung with coloured lanterns, listening to Venetian and Neapolitan songs, while he had been shut away in a fearfully narrow den, far from the sunshine, life, and brightness of Venice.

He fancied he was taken over the Bridge of Sighs, dragged below to the dungeons, and strangled. Then his body was put on a gondola, carried out, and cast into the sea. Pietro woke in a cold perspiration to face his dead wife. *She* was the one to go; he must be left! Steps outside startled him. Men had come to measure.

Ah! What sacrilege! Strangers entering the sacred presence of eternal sleep? Pietro rushed to the door, and faced them haughtily.

"I will do your work!" he said. They exchanged a looked that seemed to say: "The Signor is mad—his grief has turned his brain."

But Pietro Romano seized the tape, and closed the door.

With trembling fingers he measured the slim figure of his girl-wife.

"Plenty of room," he muttered to himself—"room for the six large crosses I shall lay at your side. Your arms shall be outstretched, as when you basked in the sunshine on your couch. Plenty of room for my angel!—my life!"

"So large?" said the men, when Pietro returned.

"Yes, and beautiful as large! The plate without must be solid gold—the handles, too. No funeral in all Europe should be more magnificent than that of the fair Juliette Romano!"

They went their way, and Pietro returned to his silent watch by the cold figure.

Presently a voice whispered low without. The door opened softly; Juliette's mother crept in.

"I said I would not see you," cried Pietro, crouching to the ground. "Go—leave me alone with my wife!"

She took no heed of his wild words.

"Why do we live—you and I?" he muttered. "What good are we without Juliette?"

The mother's tears fell like rain. She looked pityingly at the haggard, despairing man.

"You are ill, Pietro," she said gently; "let me watch by her awhile. Go and eat and sleep."

"I will taste nothing till she is laid in the ground. She goes with you to the home of her childhood; she will rest for ever in Père la Chaise."

"You will faint by the way," replied Juliette's mother, taking up her position near the bed.

He grew so uneasy at her presence that at last she was obliged to leave.

"Poor Pietro!" she sighed, in the midst of her own grief; "he is more mad than ever in this hour of bitterest trial."

The great, handsome coffin came at last, with the golden plate, on which was inscribed:

"Juliette,
"Love of my Life.
"Buried in the Heart of Pietro Romano."

"They must not see her," he said, "those coarse, rough men."

So he drew the white curtains about the bed, as they brought the coffin in. "To-night," he told them, "I will place her myself in her last bed, and close the coffin lid. Come early in the morning and screw it down. The vulgar gaze shall never rest on dead Juliette."

Before moving the body, Pietro bade her mother say farewell to the calm, sweet face.

"Why did she shudder when kissing those icy lips?" he wondered. "Juliette was beautiful in death as in life. There was nothing to fear."

Then he sent her away.

An hour later Juliette lay in her magnificent coffin. The lid was closed. The following morning they had screwed it down, and Juliette was taken to the home of her fathers.

Strangely enough, though all arrangements had been previously made by Pietro, after his final farewell of the body, he mysteriously vanished.

The funeral party were obliged to leave without him, active search in the meanwhile being made.

"I believe the poor Signor is mad," declared Juliette's mother. "He has rushed away to hide himself. But the dead cannot wait. We must go."

So they laid the beautiful Juliette in Père la Chaise, and her husband was seen no more.

Whence had he fled—that wild, impassioned man, distracted by grief?

None could tell, and his wife's mourners waited in vain by the grave to see if he would come.

Some weeks later a letter reached the mother in Pietro's familiar hand.

She tore it open eagerly. The words paralysed her.

"Death was by poison. Do not seek for me—you can never find Pietro Romano."

The message, which came from America, fell like a thunderbolt upon Juliette's family. The idea that he had poisoned her seemed incredible, but they were determined to prove if this were truth, or merely the ravings of a maniac.

Permission was obtained to exhume poor Juliette.

As the massive lid opened a gasp of wondering horror escaped the witnesses. Two bodies locked in each other's arms met their astonished gaze. One the fair form of Juliette disfigured by decay, the other the crumbling remains of Pietro Romano. Clutched in his hand were the following words:

"I sleep with my Juliette—good-night! To bed for the last time. Our lips meet—we are one in death as in life. I have posted a letter which will be forwarded from America to Paris by a friend. Poison indeed lies buried with Juliette, but in the body of her devoted husband."

Winifred Graham.

* * *

AN OLD FOOL.

WHEN Colonel Starforth married Vera Harrington people said that he was an old fool, and, truth to tell, he had some misgivings upon the subject himself. John Starforth was sixty; vigorous, indeed, and erect of figure; kindly, chivalrous, and handsome still, in spite of his white hairs, but still sixty. And Vera was only twenty-two.

Of course he had money, and equally, of course, she had none. They had met just after the Colonel's return from India, and he, an old bachelor, whose only love had been his profession, fell and worshipped like a boy of eighteen. Vera liked him well enough. He was kind and gentle, and, above all, rich, and her life had been dull and void of those good things which make life's happiness. For it is only when we have them that riches are not everything.

And so they were married, and, in a way, were happy. The Colonel did not expect too much; it was enough that he might call this sweet flower his own, enough that his wife did not shrink from his caresses, half timid but wholly adoring. And Vera could not but feel affection for the man who lavished upon her all that his wealth could obtain, could not but be happy in the luxury that surrounded her. It was all so strange and beautiful—for a time.

For riches are only everything when we have them not.

The inevitable happened at last. Vera tired of her husband and fell in love with a young man. Perhaps she fell in love with a young man and tired of her husband.

Age was evidently beginning to tell upon the Colonel. He was quieter than of yore, and the grey hair had taken a whiter tinge. He did not rest well, and at length continued sleeplessness made him weak and ill—weak enough to endanger a man of his age. He bore up bravely, like the gallant old soldier that he was, but he had to confess himself vanquished in the end.

Vera nursed him devotedly. There is a latent instinct that makes every woman a tender nurse: a sweet sense of motherhood that brims with kindness for any helpless object. So, woman-like, she tended him with unselfish devotion and gentle, loving kindness.

One day she looked idly at the prescription the doctor had left. Chloral hydrate, chloral hydrate? Why, she had some of that upstairs. Chloral hydrate!

And then some horrible fiend came into her heart, driving out the tenderness, the loving kindness, the very woman in her. She might be so happy, but for the old man lying there half-helpless in his bed. What right had he to spoil her young life and all the happiness that might come to her?

It was time for his sleeping draught, but Colonel Starforth slept when his wife entered the room, noiselessly as a practised nurse. The old man looked so wan and haggard that Vera half-stooped to kiss him, then started back hastily, and poured something into the glass she held. She looked at her husband again, and her hands shook a little as she drew another little bottle from her pocket and added its contents to the measure in the glass.

Suddenly she rushed from the room, and then stopped trembling. The sick man had moved. What if he had seen her? Her limbs gave way beneath her; the blood lashed and throbbed in her ears. Then she recovered a little; the beating in her ears died away like the distant thud of a horse's hoofs. She rose up, still weak, but firm and unflinching once more. She had left that bottle upon the table, and she must fetch it away.

At the threshold she lingered and peered into the room. All was well, after all. The Colonel lay there quietly, and she went in and secured the incriminating bottle. As she stood there the Colonel opened his eyes.

"Is that you, my dear?" he asked gently.

"Yes, I—I came to give you your sleeping draught."

"Thank you, Vera." He raised himself painfully and took the glass from her, clasping her hand as he did so.

"My child," he said, "have I made it very hard for you?"

"I—I do not understand."

"Yes you do, Vera, and I would willingly take this from you if I thought it would help your happiness. But you would be sorry afterwards—and I would not have you sorry. Stay, my child, I know everything; your love for young Fordyce. And, Vera, I saw you measure out this draught. Shall I drink it now?"

"Oh, no, no! Only forgive me."

"My dear, I have little to forgive. I should not have brought the cloud of my old age across the sunshine of your youth. But I won't trouble you long—and Hawks has my will. Everything is yours, child, of course; I have made you pay hardly enough for it."

"Why, my little girl—there, there, you must not cry. Kiss me and run away; I would rather be alone for a little while."

Vera's tears rained hot salt into his eyes as she kissed him, and when she was alone there came upon her a loathing of self that was more bitter than any grief. How vile a thing had she been! And he, how noble and how kind!

Fordyce! Surely she had not done this thing for Fordyce? Why, she hated him. It had all been some horrid madness which was gone now, never to return. For she loved her husband now—the fire of those few moments had burned away all save the purity from her heart. Dear husband, how happy they would be, he in her love and she in her atonement and his love as well. How happy they would be, how happy!

Upstairs her husband lay as she had left him. Some time he lay, till presently something hot trickled down a little furrow that had come but lately in his bronzed cheek, and a stifled sob broke from him. A little longer he lay, and then, still sobbing, staggered weakly from the bed and took up the glass his wife had left upon the table.

E. C. WAGGENER.

The Lottery Ticket.

CELIA BONNER, coming over the hill from Gatesborough to West Gatesborough in the teeth of a keen November storm, wondered why this particular storm affected her so disagreeably. Generally in such weather she beguiled the way with cheerful thoughts and calculations, all overspread by calm complacency that she had at last gained this position as teacher, so long coveted; but to-night she found herself wishing that the school were at West Gatesborough instead of at Gatesborough, or else that her mother and the small house and farm which was their sole estate could be moved nearer to the school.

This wishing was all so unlike Celia's matter-of-fact nature in general that she sought hard for the reason why she should be taken with such a desire. She soon found it in the fact that she was undeniably hungry.

She was wet, cold, and bedraggled, but most of all she was hungry, with the keen, uncompromising hunger of healthy young girlhood. Surely this of itself was enough to induce gloomy thoughts and futile wishes.

"I was silly not to think of it sooner," she half-laughed to herself. "I had begun to forget that I had a very small lunch this noon. But never mind, mother will have a hot supper waiting for me."

Then she turned the last bend in the road, and seeing the light in her mother's kitchen, stumbled along more quickly than ever. A feeble light it was, and typical in a measure of everything within the house, from the mother down, except when Celia was there. Even the fires Mrs. Bonner kindled had a trick of burning weakly and uncertainly.

When, a few minutes after she saw the light, Celia burst into the kitchen, with her cloak and umbrella held out before her, the savoury supper she had so keenly anticipated was in no way apparent to her senses. The table was provided with no other edibles than hard biscuits, a very few slices of cold corned beef, and half a Dutch cheese.

Heedless now of the drip which bespattered the carpet, Celia stood still.

"Mother, you don't mean to say this is all you have for supper?" Affecting intense preoccupation with the tea-kettle, her mother responded:

"I don't see but it's pretty good, Celia."

"But, mother, we've had nothing for the last week, and I told you I was starving for something hearty and warm. I gave you money this morning to buy a steak."

"Well, you see there's so many other things to get," Mrs. Bonner pleaded weakly. There was something so furtive and insincere in her manner that Celia, without difficulty, jumped to a conclusion.

"Mother, I believe you've spent that money for another foreign lottery ticket."

This abrupt statement revealed the skeleton which had stood in the closet of this poor little household for more than a year. It was a subject so repulsive to Celia that she hated to speak of it, but so dear to the mother that she loved to enlarge upon it.

"And supposing I did, Celia?" she said, more confidently. "Fortune's going to turn sometime, and I'll be bound you'll be glad enough if we come into fifteen hundred pounds all at once, as that young man did up in Manchester."

The lines of the argument were all wearily familiar to Celia, but hunger gave an added vigour to her protest.

"I might be demoralised by it," she said, "but I'd never be glad. Whether you gain or lose, the principle is the same. It's nothing but gambling, and though you'd feel pretty badly to hear that our Joe in London had become a gambler, you think it no harm to be one yourself."

Mrs. Bonner remained silent a little while, and then began to cry softly.

"It's too bad for you to scold in that way, Celia," she said, "when all I'm thinking of is your good and Joe's. I don't see that I'm committing any sin."

"You've never been the same, mother, since you bought that first ticket two years ago. It's like drinking; you want to keep on at it. I don't mean to be unkind; but I can't make it seem anything less than wicked."

The stern young preacher softened a little here, and a plaintive sniffle, by way of acknowledgment, prefaced Mrs. Bonner's reply:

"I don't believe I'll ever need to go into them again, Celia. I feel it that I'm going to get something this time. I had a dream last night, and in it I was counting out fifteen bags of gold!"

It was useless to argue further. Celia moodily set about clearing away the dishes, and said no more.

A few weeks later, coming over the hill in a snow-storm, Celia found the little light absent from her mother's window. Filled at once with a vague alarm, she hurried over the remaining part of the road and into the house, calling as she went: "Mother! Where are you, mother?"

No answering voice greeted her, but groping to the mantel, she lighted a lamp. Then turning to examine the room, she saw her mother sitting in her accustomed chair by the window.

"Why?" Celia began, half-relieved, half-provoked, and then the question which was to follow died on her lips, for it became apparent that, though death did not yet confront her, she was looking upon its strange similitude—paralysis.

Her mother's whole body was rigid and motionless. The poor hands, quieted for ever, hung down beside it. The tongue, whose irrelevancy had often wearied poor practical Celia, was now for ever still.

For what seemed an hour, though in reality it was hardly more than a moment, Celia stood almost as motionless; then, running down the road to their nearest neighbour, she brought her back, pitying and exclaiming as she came.

Together they lifted the limp figure to the lounge, upon which they wheeled Mrs. Bonner to the bed in the room off the sitting-room. Only when they laid her there did Celia, bending over her in agonised appeal, discover that the eyes alone were instinct with life. They looked up to Celia with pitiful intelligence, seeming to respond to her cry. Then wandering through the door in their gaze, they fixed themselves on Mrs. Denny with a total change of expression.

Celia turned round in startled surprise, to discover that the kindly neighbour, with the instinct of a housekeeper, was "tidying up" the sitting-room, and, as part of the effort, was now examining an envelope. Celia remembered that she had seen this lying on the floor beside her mother's chair, but she had been too sadly lacking in curiosity to examine it.

"What is it, Mrs. Denny?" she now asked. Then she covered her face with her hands, as Mrs. Denny replied:

"For mercy's sake! The poor thing! If it isn't one of those foreign lottery lists! Now, that's what's given her this stroke, I suppose. She's been disappointed again, and she set so much store by it. Shall I burn it, Celia?"

"Yes," Celia answered, with sorrowful energy, and then corrected herself as the haunting eyes on the pillow caught hers with a sudden fierce protest.

"No, Mrs. Denny. She doesn't want it burnt, I think. Put it in the top left-hand drawer, please."

Soon after, and all through the days which intervened before the end came, that mournful gaze concentrated itself most of all on the old family Bible which rested on a stand in the corner of the room where she lay, and this, too, Celia interpreted.

"She wants me to read the Bible to her. Oh, poor mother, you know now, don't you, that your truest riches are in that?"

So hour after hour during the few short weeks in which her mother lingered on, the daughter read and re-read the promises which relate to eternal life. Sometimes peace fell like a veil upon the dim windows of that fast-darkening tabernacle, and again such restless entreaty looked out from them that Mrs. Denny interrupted the reading.

"Celia, she's got something on her mind that we don't know of yet. It seems sometimes as though her eyes would pierce through that Bible as you sit there reading, and when you ain't at it, she's still staring at it."

But always Celia's reply was the same:

"It's only that she's growing more eager for it all the time. It seems the greatest comfort I have that she loves it so. Yes, mother, I'll read more!"

The final summons came very quietly at last. Celia, going away for a much-needed nap, had smiled down upon her, saying:

"Good-bye, mother! I'm going to lie down just for a little while. God bless you, mother dear!"

The poor, pathetic eyes had seemed almost to smile in return, but when Celia awoke from her nap they were closed in their last long slumber. Whatever was the secret they had yearned to disclose, all opportunity was now for ever gone by.

Two days later they laid Mrs. Bonner in the old churchyard, and Celia returned to her teaching, with a new tombstone as the immediate object of her ambition. The blinds were closed in the old house, and the doors locked up, and for the present Celia boarded at Gatesborough.

The weeks wore on until the winter term was nearly over. Then Celia's brother Joe wrote from London, begging her to join him there. He was well, and was lonely. Why should not Celia let or sell the old place, and come to keep house for him. He was getting on well, and could make her comfortable.

The little house under the hill could never be the same to her again. Whether there or in Gatesborough, her living was but scanty at best, and most of all she longed to be with dear old Joe. Almost as soon as the wish was expressed, a tenant was found for the house, whereupon Celia with Mrs. Denny's help began the task of clearing away and putting things in order. Mrs. Denny offered to take care of any such relics as Celia chose to keep.

"If I have room in my trunk," Celia said, "I shall certainly take the old Bible. I can't bear to leave that behind."

Then, being alone and somewhat tired, she began to turn over the pages of the sacred book, stopping to read here and there. She opened, all unaware, at two pages where she was not accustomed to read; and there, between them, lay a lottery ticket bearing the number—68,498.

Celia looked down upon it for a moment with the half-fascinated and yet wholly disgusted gaze which she might have bestowed upon an intruding snake. Then suddenly a thought which she found almost equally venomous darted into her mind.

"Was this the reason mother used to look so longingly at the Bible?" she thought. "Oh! surely not."

Then, leaving the book open on the stand, she rushed in a tumult of fear and apprehension to the other side of the room, and opened the top left-hand drawer.

There, where Mrs. Denny had placed it, still lay the well-remembered fatal envelope. Opening it Celia scanned the list of numbers which had won the principal prizes at the December drawing—32,413, 59,162, 44,122, 58,227; and then, dancing before her eyes, 68,498.

The poor futile dream had come true. The fifteen hundred pounds, represented by the fifteen bags of gold, had for one moment flashed before the dreamer's eyes; and then, before her feet could carry her from one room into the next, before her eager hand could grasp the small blue slip, the hand of death had arrested her.

Just in the first painful shock of her discovery, Celia wondered if her conscience could stand the strain. It seemed as if Fate, not Providence, had been at work, and had wrought this bitter piece of irony.

For a long hour she groped amid darkened thoughts. Then she rose, and again, as on that fatal night, groped her way to the mantel. She lighted the lamp, and stood looking down into the smouldering logs upon the hearth. While she looked, a new thought came to trouble her, a new though a very feeble temptation assailed her.

"Your mother wanted it most of all for Joe and you," the tempter whispered. "She would have been happier dying if she thought you would have had it."

But, with some of the old fire in voice and eyes, Celia answered aloud, as though to a visible opponent:

"I will not do it! It was like one of those poisonous marsh damps which lure people on to death. It led her there; she would have been alive now if this weakness had not taken hold of her. And I would rather die than profit by it now. I will burn the thing, so that the temptation may not come to me again."

In another moment the small blue strip of paper curled and shrivelled over the dying logs, then burst into a mocking flame, and in a moment more was a thin little sheet of ashes.

N. N.

THE - CHLORAL - EATER.

AT the club it had been known for years that he ate chloral. The characteristic ashen complexion, the dull, lifeless expression of his lustreless eyes, the parchment-like appearance of his harsh, dry skin, the tremor of his palsied hand, and his general lackadaisical and irresponsible actions pointed unquestionably to the chloral habit.

More than this, he didn't deny it, and nightly he consumed large quantities of the seductive drug. He would seek some remote corner of the club-room, and under the influence of this powerful narcotic, taken in liberal doses, pass the entire evening in a state of absolute stupor.

Smith, for that was his plebeian name, was only forty-five, but judging from his prematurely aged appearance he was quite sixty.

On this particularly stormy night in January, of which I write, it was after twelve o'clock, and one by one the members of the club had deserted their wine and billiards and disappeared, not without considerable hesitancy and imprecations on the turbulent weather, however, into the howling wind and blinding snow.

Smith sat dozing in his favourite corner; Dr. Dunbar and Captain Dickinson still lingered over a half-emptied bottle of Médoc.

"I say, Dunbar, he's a queer old duck over there in the corner. I wonder how he began it? He seems to be unusually saturated to-night. Let's pump him."

"Better let him alone," growled Dunbar, who was in a bad humour on account of his enforced stay at the club; "I wish this infernal storm would permit a man to go home without running the risk of being frozen to death. It seems to me it's about time to kick him out of the club. He's a nuisance, and shouldn't be allowed to come here with his wretched chloral."

At this juncture, Smith arose and staggered across the room to where the two men sat. He languidly sank into the remaining vacant chair at the table, and for a moment vaguely looked about him. Then fumbling in his pocket, he drew forth a half-emptied bottle, from which he poured out into the palm of his hand about a teaspoonful of the shining crystals, the whole of which he swallowed, with an unsteady tilt of the head, at one gulp.

The effect of the drug seemed to stimulate him to consciousness.

"Ten doses like that to-night," he said, "and I can scarcely feel it. I can't keep this up much longer, it's power is going. I'll cut my throat when this fails to affect me."

"What is it?" inquired Dickinson, by way of making conversation, although every man in the club knew Smith's habit.

"Chloral."

"Chloral?" repeated Dickinson.

"Yes."

"How long have you been eating it?"

"About fifteen years."

"Began like all the rest, I suppose, for medicinal purposes?"

Smith looked uneasily about the room. It was deserted, save by the three men seated round the table; a diabolical gleam shone from his glazed eyes.

"I took it to commit suicide," he slowly said, as he glanced in the direction of Dunbar.

"Suicide?" echoed Dickinson.

"Yes; but I didn't take enough, and the effect was so delightful, that I concluded life with chloral wasn't half bad after all. So, as long as the alluring influence of the delicious drug lasted, I decided to live; when it ceases to soothe me, I will carry into effect my solemn vow; then"—drawing his skinny hand across his throat, with a suggestive shrug of his shoulders—"I'll follow her—and him.

"He was a student when he met Lida. Let me see, that was in '75—yes, that's right. It was twenty years ago, Lida was only sixteen, and that infamous villain still lives.

"Poor girl," he continued, as a deep-red spot burnt into his sunken cheek. "*She* was more successful. Lida never woke, and the doctors, fools that they were, said it was heart failure. Yes, they said she died from mitral insufficiency, which the unsuspecting and credulous public accepted without questioning. Mitral insufficiency, indeed!" And he gave a weird, gruesome chuckle to himself, as he sarcastically repeated the learned diagnosis.

"We parted at twelve o'clock on Christmas Eve. The following morning found Lida dead! I alive, and oblivious to all sorrow and care. I revelled in a Utopia of bliss, in fields Elysian; my joy was unspeakable, my dream surpassingly felicitous. I longed to live on and on in this ecstatic state, with never a heartache or a pain, without the shadow of grief or affection. It was chloral! I had discovered the panacea of all human ills, the charm for every mortal misery, a boon and a blessing to heart-broken and suffering humanity. From that day I have never been without it."

It was apparent that the topic was distasteful to Dr. Dunbar, who insisted on talking of the latest club gossip instead; but Dickinson's curiosity was aroused, and Smith seemed to be in an unusually frank and talkative mood, so the subject was continued.

"Must have been an unhappy love affair?" Dickinson ventured to ask, by way of eliciting Smith's story, which promised unusual interest. Not heeding this last remark, Smith fixed his unsteady gaze on Dr. Dunbar as he continued:

"That was a long time ago, and he still lives. But I'll kill him yet—yes, I'll kill him, the scoundrel! He won't live long. I'll be the last of the three to die. I have shadowed him for years. I know him, the villain! I'll kill him yet!"

He seemed to be gloating over the imaginary tragedy, as he rubbed his shrunken hands together in ghoulish glee.

"He was a medical student when he won Lida's love, her confidence, and her trust, and put her through a mock marriage ceremony. When he graduated he left her. For weeks she waited in vain to hear from him. But no word came to her despairing soul. Still loath to believe he meant to forsake her, she wrote to the address he left, but the letter came back. No one by that name was there. The awful truth prostrated her, and the overstrained thread of life all but snapped. I met her two years afterwards. I was irresistibly attracted by her sad, sweet face and her gentle, resigned manner. I loved her as only a man in the possession of a clear conscience and the knowledge of an upright life can love. I asked her to be my wife, to share with me life's joys and sorrows, life's trials, triumphs, and tribulations; that with her the rugged path of existence would become smooth and joyous. She was sobbing violently.

"'No, no,' she cried, in the agony of despair, 'don't break my heart, don't ask me that.' Then she told me all. At first I refused to believe her, but I saw she was terribly in earnest. I saw the truth of her pathetic story indelibly written in her tear-stained face. I was too much stunned to answer. I was as one suddenly bereft of reason, and I left her. What occurred during the next two days I don't remember. It was in the middle of the night when I first realised that my life was wrecked, and I burst into a fit of uncontrollable weeping.

"After this I grew calmer. I saw her night after night, but it was no use. We could never be happy. She never heard of the wretch who had destroyed her life's happiness and mine. Existence became unbearable. On Christmas Eve we parted, pledged to end our miserable lives that night. The next morning they found her cold and lifeless. I had discovered the elixir of human happiness, and I determined to live—to live to avenge that dead girl's wrongs, to live for the satisfaction of sending that scoundrel's treacherous soul to the shades of oblivion.

"Not until I kill him will I die contented. I know him, I have found him, the beast, and I'll kill him. He yet lives, but not for long. Ha! ha! I know him, and have for years. Ha! ha! ha! the villain, I think he knows now who I am. This will do it, my charmer, my faithful; this will do it, my trusted avenger. Ha! ha! ha!" and laughing like a fiend he drew a revolver from his pocket and carelessly brought it down upon the top of the table. Dr. Dunbar, who was sitting opposite, drew back, and was about to rush from the room, but too late.

Whether from accident or intentionally, we never knew, but as the revolver struck the top of the table, it was discharged, the ball piercing Dr. Dunbar's heart. Smith, laughing like a demon, fled from the room and disappeared in the blinding storm. The next morning he was found half buried in snow, the empty chloral bottle by his side.

SIGEL ROUSH.

THE QUEEN OF NIGHT

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BY HEADON HILL,

(*Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," "The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.*)

SUMMARY.

Gaston Vizard gives Sir Simon Crawshay an introduction to the agent of the vessel *Queen of Night*, in order that he may make special arrangements with regard to the trip of his wealthy ward, Miss Challenor. Dr. Zavertal calls on Vizard, and informs him that a new captain will be wanted before the next cruise.

The *Queen of Night*, under the guise of a popular pleasure boat, is used in reality by a set of unscrupulous adventurers for the purpose of doing away with objectionable relatives.

In Chapter I. Cyril Forrester receives his dismissal from the Flower Steamship Company for breaking the regulations while saving the life of Miss Aline Challenor. He applies for and obtains from Nathan and Co., of Fenchurch Street, the vacant command of the ocean yacht, *Queen of Night*.

Becoming engaged to Miss Challenor (who comes in for a quarter of a million on attaining her majority), he obtains an interview with Sir Simon Crawshay, who promptly refuses a consent to his engagement, and informs him that his ward will be out of his way for the next six weeks, as she is about to take a cruise on board the *Queen of Night!* On going on board he is introduced to Dr. Zavertal, among whose patients are Miss Challenor, the Earl of Darranmore (a boy of fourteen coming into £40,000 a year), and Desmond Olebar.

A stowaway is discovered who works as an assistant steward.

CHAPTER VIII.

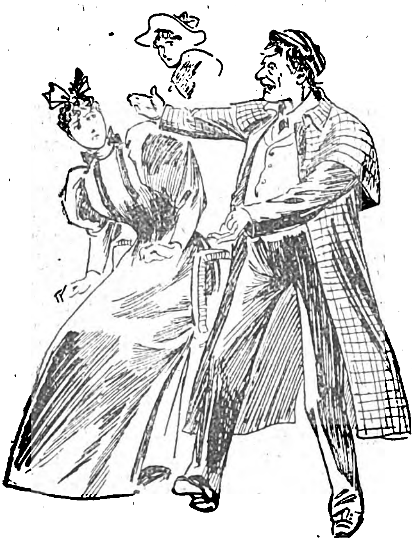
THE FIRST DEATH.

THE run across the Bay of Biscay was accomplished in fine weather, and on the morning of the fifth day out, when the passengers came on deck, Gibraltar was in sight right ahead. By the time breakfast was over we had threaded our way through the coal hulks, and the *Queen of Night* lay at anchor a quarter of a mile from the New Mole. In a twinkling she was surrounded by the usual medley of shore boats manned by the jabbering hucksters of water melons and grapes. Away on the Rock the bugles were sounding merrily for morning parade, and even from our anchorage the great grey mass with the straggling town at foot was seen to be as gay as a geranium bed with the blaze of British scarlet.

My instructions from the owners were to allow a clear twenty-four hours at this port, to enable the passengers to go ashore and explore it thoroughly. Numerous parties had already been formed for the purpose, and our boats were soon busily engaged in transporting sightseers to the landing place.

Among the first to start was a boatload personally conducted by Zavertal, comprising Lord Darranmore and his tutor, Mr. Orlebar being also with the party. The latter had been drinking heavily ever since he came on board, and I heard the Doctor trying to induce him to remain quietly on the ship under the pretext that the excitement of a day's outing would be injurious to him. But this representation only had the effect of increasing his determination to go, and Zavertal yielded—somewhat too readily, I thought.

Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth had arranged to join a party which was going under the escort of General Waldo, and, at the last moment, finding that there was nothing to keep me on board, I decided to accompany them. On landing we strolled through the Main Gate and up the steep street to the post-office for letters and telegrams. Entering the building, we were met by the Doctor's party just leaving after making a similar call. His convoy were mostly busy with their correspondence, but Zavertal himself crammed a cablegram he was reading into his pocket and came up to me, looking worried and anxious.



Causing alarm to the half-dozen ladies of our party.

"That infernal fellow Orlebar has given us the slip," he said. "Perhaps I ought to have been more careful, but as he gets all he wants on the ship I didn't think that he would seize upon the chance of a shore racket. I expect he's soaking himself in some wine-shop by this time."

"I shouldn't trouble about it," I replied. "The man is a free agent, and so long as he doesn't make himself personally offensive to others we can't very well control him."

But, as it turned out, the contingency I mentioned was just what we had to reckon with. Zavertal's party and mine separated again, his to go through the galleries and mount to the flag-staff, while we preferred to loiter away the day in the Spanish shops and among the quaint byways of the old town. We lunched at the hotel, and later on we were sitting in the public gardens, having what Waldo called "a high old time," when that worthy veteran, who was next me, touched my arm and whispered:

"Here comes the black sheep. Look out for squalls, Captain; he appears to be on a thundering out-West tear."

Following the direction of his eyes, I saw Orlebar coming towards us, and his demeanour certainly warranted the General's warning. His bloodshot eyes glared with drunken ferocity, and his wild gesticulations, as he made straight for us, were already causing alarm to the half-dozen ladies of our party. Mrs. Brinkworth especially, who was sitting on the other side of the General, turned as white as a sheet, and I remembered the recognition of her by Orlebar which I had noticed on the first day out.

It was quickly shown that Aline's companion was indeed the cause and object of the dipsomaniac's singular demonstration. Rushing up to her, he commenced a flood of incoherent abuse from which, before Waldo and I laid hands on him, it was only possible to gather that he meant to imply that she was his divorced wife. Realising that the wretched creature was not master of his actions we handled him gently, and taking an arm each led him to the garden gates. There I gave him to understand that he would be handed over to the police if he returned to annoy the ladies further, adding that his baggage and his man-servant would be sent ashore the moment I got back to the ship, as it was impossible that I could risk a repetition of his outrageous conduct by permitting him to continue the voyage. I was worked up into a fine white heat, and did not stop to consider whether the owners would approve a course which would entail their refunding the price of his ticket.

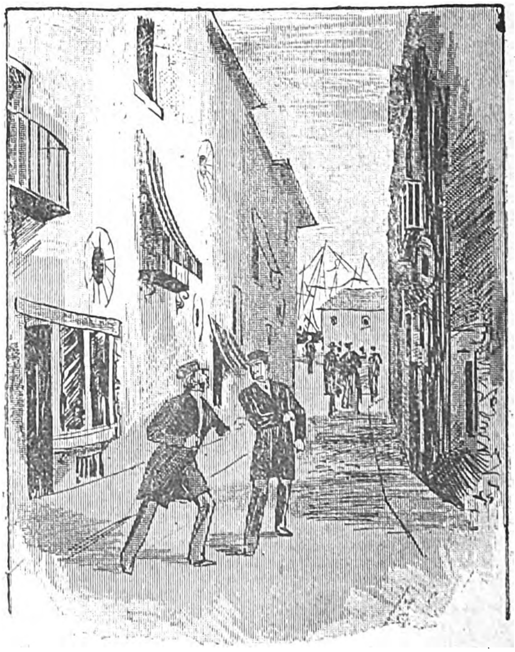
Orlebar went cursing away towards the town, and Waldo and I walked back to the others. We had collared the drunken man so promptly that we had had no time to note how the victim of his diatribes received them, and it was reassuring to find that, though still very pale, Mrs. Brinkworth was quite composed. Aline with generous vigour had taken up the cudgels on her companion's behalf, and was explaining to the other ladies that far from Orlebar having divorced his wife she had in truth divorced him for gross cruelty and misconduct.

"Ella has shown me copies of the *Times* containing the report of the trial," the fair young champion was saying, as we resumed our seats. "She has nothing to be ashamed of or to conceal."

"Perhaps it would have been better if I had let it be known that my late husband was on board," said the injured woman sadly, "but I was aware that he had married again, and I thought that he would have been the first to want to keep our former relations secret."

"And so he would, I guess, if he could have controlled himself," said Waldo. "It is the condition he is in that we have to thank for to-day's outbreak. I can't think what our usually astute doctor is up to—leaving him on the rampage about the town."

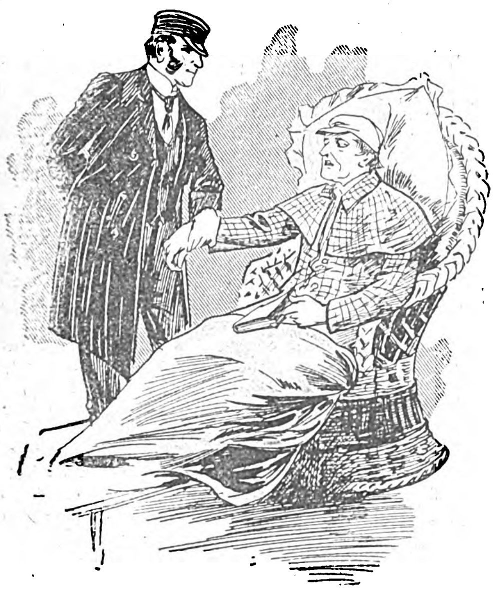
The ladies of the party, as indeed, all throughout the ship, were already prejudiced against Orlebar, and Aline's advocacy effectually nipped in the bud any tendency they might have had to look askance at Ella Brinkworth because of the unpleasant occurrence. In fact, they treated her with the greatest sympathy, and when the poor thing began to explain that the name she was known by was



"Just a word with you, Captain."

really her maiden name, they begged her not to distress herself by referring further to the matter.

We had arranged to return to the ship for dinner, and the scene in the public gardens having rather damped our ardour, I do not think that anyone was sorry when it was time to go down to the boats. In taking a short cut to the landing-place I piloted the party through one of the narrow streets in the lower town, where every other house was a sailors' drinking den, either under the pretentious title of wine shop, or as an avowed cabaret, and we had nearly reached the end of the not very reputable thoroughfare, when a man hurrying out of an open doorway almost ran against me. His apologies were cut short at the very commencement by mutual recognition. It was Doctor Zavertal, and I had a pretty good inkling of what he was up to.



Felt his patient's pulse.

"Pray don't think that I am on the spree, ladies," he laughed in response to the looks of astonishment cast at him. "I must hope to be able to clear myself later, but—just a word with you, Captain," and he drew me aside, while the others, in obedience to my gesture, went slowly on towards the landing-place.

"You are looking for Orlebar?" I said.

"Yes," he replied. "I fully expected to find him at Saccone's, but he must have got among the less respectable boozing-kens. I am sure to unearth him somewhere hereaway, though."

"I shouldn't waste time on him," I replied, and then I briefly recounted what had happened, concluding with my determination to send Orlebar's luggage ashore, together with his valet, and to leave the lot behind. Zavertal listened with every appearance of genuine annoyance to the story of the wretched man's behaviour, but the moment I mentioned the course I was going to take I felt that he disapproved of it, though his face expressed nothing more than respectful concern.

"You have quite made up your mind that this will be best, Captain Forrester?" he said, and I fancied that his eyes hardened as he spoke.

"Certainly," I replied. "We can't have a drunken blackguard on board insulting people with reckless lies. What other 'best,' as you call it, can there be?"

He looked at me thoughtfully before answering, not as if in any doubt as to his purpose, but rather with a cold, measuring glance that strove to fathom the lengths to which he could safely go with me. So at least it seemed to me, and the prying scrutiny galled me into impatience.

"Come," I said, looking significantly up the street to the corner round which Aline and the rest had now disappeared, "have you any objection, Doctor Zavertal?"

He came a step nearer, and spoke so straight, that once again a budding suspicion, ridiculous in its vagueness and born of what then looked like merest trifles, faded into the background.

"As you ask me the direct question, sir," he said, "it is my duty to say that I have the very gravest objection to leaving Mr. Orlebar behind. He has been entrusted to me by—his relatives, as a patient in serious danger of his life. How can I reconcile myself to leaving him stranded here, where he will probably do himself to death in a week? What shall I say to his people on my return, and what of my professional reputation? I do not see how you can expect me to endorse your decision, and I trust sincerely that you will reconsider it. And surely, sir, the credit of the ship as a safe resort for invalids should weigh with you."

From his point of view I quite saw the force of his argument. His appeal, too, was couched so strongly and yet so modestly that almost before I knew it I was debating whether I could yield to his wishes without loss of dignity. I remembered Nathan's instruction to defer to him in all matters affecting the passengers, and I was the more ready to do so as he had made no attempt to avail himself of an authority which he doubtless knew he possessed.

Moreover, if I held out, and he cabled home to the owners for confirmation of his wishes, I should look a good deal more foolish than if I gave in now, in the very probable event of their backing him up. As it was, no one besides Waldo and Orlebar himself knew of what I had intended.

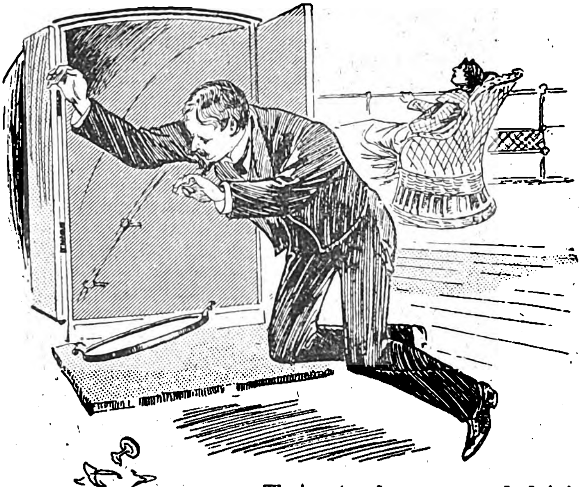
"We appear to be both working to the same end, Doctor—the welfare of the passengers," I said. "Supposing that I cancel the arrangement to oblige you, can you give me any sort of assurance that the man shall not repeat his conduct?"

"You shall have my personal guarantee that nothing of the sort shall happen again," was the reply. "I cannot engage to cure the fellow, either of his disease or of his propensities, but you shall have my entire co-operation in putting any restraint upon him that may be necessary. I don't care so long as I have him on the ship for treatment, and, between you and me, sir, I think that death will relieve us of his presence before long."

"So let it be, then," I said, and leaving him to continue the search, I hurried down to the boat to find the others embarked, and waiting for me in some curiosity as to the cause of my delay. I said nothing, however, during the pull out to the boat, out of consideration for Mrs. Brinkworth, but confided the change of plan to Waldo as soon as we were on board and the ladies had gone to their cabins. To my satisfaction, he abstained from chaffing me on my being over-ruled by the Doctor, and he even assented that "second thoughts were often best."

Orlebar was brought on board by Zavertal while dinner was on in the saloon, and being taken straight to his stateroom to bed, he gave rise to no further uneasiness that night. We weighed anchor the next morning at ten o'clock, and shortly afterwards he appeared on deck, to the surprise of everybody, seeming better rather than worse for the escapade of the previous day. He had his lounge placed in its usual position under the lee of the smoking-room, but, instead of perpetually sending to the bar for "pegs," according to his habit, he amused himself quietly with a novel. Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth naturally gave him a wide berth, but he evinced no sign of noticing his former wife's presence on deck.

There was a good deal of shipping about in the Straits, and, in consequence, for several hours after leaving the Rock, I remained upon the bridge, whence I had a clear view of all that went on below. Eight bells had just announced noon, when I saw Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth gather up their books and work and go down the saloon stairs. A few moments later Doctor Zavertal, who had been paying great attention to Orlebar all the morning, came out of the surgery, and, going aft, felt his patient's pulse, carefully timing the result with his chronometer. He came away immediately, his face very grave, and then he, too, disappeared down the saloon stairs, after stopping on the way to answer some remark which General Waldo, whom he met, made in passing. After parting from the Doctor, Waldo went on and chatted for a moment or two with Orlebar—somewhat to my surprise, considering the man's conduct on the day previous—and then he joined a group of passengers further aft.



The empty glass was smashed into half-a-dozen pieces.

At the end of five minutes Enriquez, the stowaway, now serving as an assistant steward, came on deck with a tray on which was a glass of dark liquid that looked like port wine. He took it to Orlebar, who drank it at a gulp and replaced the glass on the tray. Enriquez then started to return below, but as he was nearing the companion-way he tripped and fell, dropping the tray on to the deck with such violence that the empty glass was smashed into half-a-dozen pieces. Regaining his feet in an instant, he collected the bits of broken glass and tossed them overboard, after which he proceeded on his way and disappeared down the stairs.

During the next few minutes I was occupied with the navigation of the vessel, and paid no attention to what was happening on deck. When I again turned my eyes that way I saw that there was a commotion in the neighbourhood of Orlebar's lounge. Zavertal was pushing his way through a number of male passengers who had gathered round it, while the ladies were all looking that way with frightened faces.

A minute later a messenger came to me from the Doctor to say that Mr. Orlebar was dead.

CHAPTER IX.

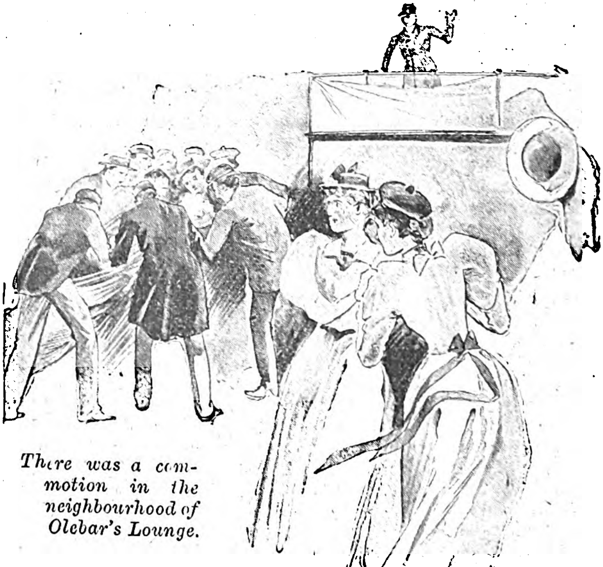
A Mysterious Communication.

The stir caused by Desmond Orlebar's death soon quieted down, hardly lasting, in fact, longer than the end of luncheon, which was luckily announced shortly after the occurrence. Zavertal saw to all the necessary arrangements for the funeral, which he advised, for excellent reasons, should take place the same afternoon, and as he professed himself able to certify the death as due to natural causes, it was not for me to put obstacles in the way. I myself conducted the short ceremony with which the body was committed to the sea from the fo'c'sle—well away from the passengers, very few of whom knew what was going on forward.

Orlebar's habits had made him so unpopular on board that the only sentiments which I heard expressed about his decease were of the "serve-him-right" order. All the sympathy evoked was reserved for the unfortunate woman who, by a strange coincidence, had found herself brought face to face with the miserable creature whom she might reasonably have expected to have gone out of her life for ever. Mrs. Brinkworth kept to her state-room for the rest of the day, but Aline, who was constant in her kindness, told me that she did not pretend to feel regret for a man who had ceased to be anything to her but a shameful memory.

A musical entertainment had been arranged for in the saloon that evening, and, true to the policy which our philosophic bo'sun had suggested, the event of the morning was regarded by Zavertal as a reason for holding rather than postponing it. Finding that he was backed in his opinion by a great majority of passengers, I offered no objection, though to me, who had never sailed in a pleasure cruiser before, it seemed a little callous. However, as the affair was to come off, I thought it would be foolish to excite controversy by absenting myself, and I confess that, apart from the absence of Aline, who was sitting with Mrs. Brinkworth in her cabin, I passed a very festive evening.

After the improvised curtain had fallen on the last "turn," I spent an hour or two on the bridge. When at length I went to my room to turn in, the passengers had all retired for the night, and, save for the throbbing of the engines, the ship was as quiet as a church. The electric arc in my cabin had been switched off as usual the last thing by my steward, and such light as there was came from an oil lamp which I kept burning all night in case I was suddenly called.

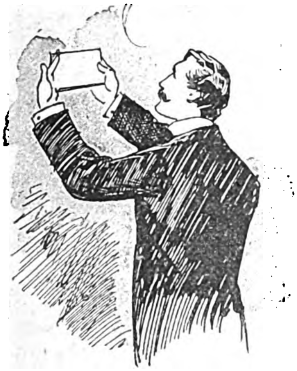


There was a commotion in the neighbourhood of Olebar's Lounge.

My table stood almost beyond the reach of the lamp's feeble rays, and therefore it was not till I prepared to undress that I noticed a sealed letter lying on the top of my blotting pad. The envelope itself was enough to pique curiosity, being addressed to me in large printed capitals that suggested a desire for disguise. Tearing it open this is what I read, written in the same obviously unnatural hand:

To Captain Forrester.
Dear Sir,—

I am not one who believes in anonymous letters except in exceptional circumstances. It is because I believe that the circumstances in which I write are *very* exceptional that I adopt a mode of communication that I ordinarily despise. I the more readily do so since in a few days I may have the pleasure of confiding in you personally.



The envelope itself was enough to pique curiosity.

At present my object is to warn you against the man Enriquez who was found hidden on board on the third day of the voyage. I can give no reasons for my warning as yet, but in all sincerity I say that in my belief you will have serious cause for regret if you disregard it. If a certain theory which has been forced upon me turns out to be correct, this man's presence on board may mean the difference between life and death to some of those entrusted to your charge.

The next port of call in the programme of the trip is Genoa; I would suggest that *en route* you should suddenly make some excuse for running into Barcelona, and there put Enriquez ashore without first giving him any hint of your intention. In order to secure the full advantage of my proposal it is also imperative that you preserve absolute silence with regard to this letter and its subject, trusting in no one, however worthy to be consulted on such a matter anyone may appear. One of my reasons for not speaking to you in person about it is the necessity—the vital necessity—of my interference being kept secret from certain persons on the ship, and that end would be defeated if we were seen putting our heads together. There are sharp eyes and ears on the *Queen of Night*.

In conclusion, you will see that if I am wrong in my theory—hunting a mare's nest, in fact—no harm will have been done by landing a stowaway in the country to which he professed to be anxious to go. If his account of himself is true he will be the first to thank you. On the other hand, if my conjectures are correct, you will have at least thrown obstacles in the way of cruel and designing men.

There was a nice production for a tired ship captain to receive at the close of a rather worrying day. It ended abruptly, without signature of any kind, the usual vulgar *noms de guerre* of anonymous letter writers, such as "A Friend" or "A Well-wisher," being despised by my correspondent. This fact, in conjunction with the earnest tone of the language, which was at least that of a person of education, weighed with me in his favour, and made me disposed to credit the writer with genuine motives. At any rate, the letter did not emanate from a jealous or quarrelsome fellow-servant of the man attacked.

We should not be off Barcelona till late on the following night, so I decided to sleep on the matter before coming to a conclusion how to act. Our course, which in any case lay close to the northern Spanish port, would not have to be altered till the last moment in the event of my wishing to run in, and there would therefore be no need for anyone to know that we were going to touch there till after everyone but the watch on deck had retired to rest. As to the letter itself, I recognised from the first that it would be useless to puzzle over its origin. It was too carefully disguised to admit of the handwriting being traced, and it was not likely that the person who placed it on my table would have entered my room while anyone was looking. All I had to do was to decide whether or no to heed the warning.

In the morning, as often happens when one goes to bed with some knotty question in doubt, I awoke with a settled mind. I would adopt the mysterious writer's suggestion, and land Enriquez at Barcelona, and the argument that prevailed was the principal, nay, the only, one in the letter—that if there was nothing about the man he would be the last to complain. Anyhow, it would be better than running risks, and as we were not steaming "on time," the delay of an hour or so would harm no one.

All that day we steered north-eastwards under the coast of Spain, running in near enough to give the passengers a view of the ruined Moorish castles and nestling villages among the vine-clad slopes. Fine weather still prevailed, and Aline and her companion emerged from their brief retirement, Mrs. Brinkworth being evidently grateful for the universal kindness that ignored her connection with Orlebar.

In looking over my private log of the voyage I find that two items pertinent to the story are entered under that day's date, though at the time they seemed of such slight importance that it is only by chance that I recorded them. One was that General Waldo was confined to his state room with an attack of gout, and would see no one but his bedroom steward, not even the Doctor, who, of course, proffered his services.

The other item was that the young Earl of Darranmore, while skylarking as usual on deck after breakfast, had another fainting fit very like the first, except that it lasted longer and left him much more prostrate. Zavertal was most assiduous in his attentions to the lad, and brought him round in time to take his place at the dinner-table.

At eleven o'clock that night, when the ladies had all gone to their cabins and only a few men lingered in the smoking-room, I calculated that we were about twenty miles south of Barcelona, steering so as to pass that port at a distance of three miles. In order to run for the harbour the course would have to be altered in half an hour, and I went up on to the bridge to be ready for the emergency. It was Mr. McIntyre, the chief officer's, watch, and I felt pretty sure that that imperturbable Scotsman would execute any orders I might give him without troubling himself about reasons.

It was as I expected. After a turn or two on the bridge I said quite quietly, and with the air of having forgotten something that didn't much matter:

"By the way, Mr. McIntyre, keep her off a point or two nor'-west, please, and bear up for Barcelona harbour. I want to send a boat ashore with a telegram."

"Aye, aye, sir," was the unconcerned reply, and he gave the requisite order to the man at the wheel without comment. To keep his mind from dwelling too much on the sudden order I broached the subject of some painting that had to be done before reaching Nice, and, conversation on the bridge of a large steamer approaching a crowded port being necessarily disjointed, the topic lasted us till the ship was in the bay and within half a mile of the town.

Not wishing to disturb the passengers and waste time by dropping anchor, I gave orders to lay to, and have a boat manned, intimating that I would go in her myself. Not till she was reported ready did I descend from the bridge, and it was only at the last moment, as I reached the head of the ladder, that I paused, as though struck with an afterthought, and told the man who was minding the side to go and turn out Enriquez, the stowaway.

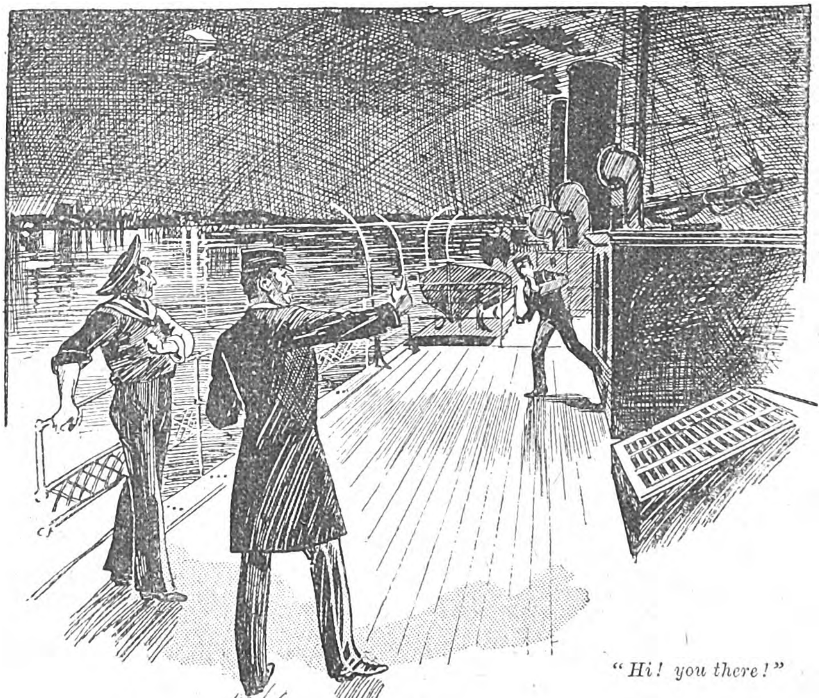
"I'll take him along as an interpreter," I said.

Waiting at the ladder-head, I was glad to see that the unexpected stoppage of the engines had caused no alarm. The ship from stem to stern was wrapped in the stillness of night, and except for a few figures—those of the watch—dimly seen forward, the long expanse of deck was deserted. In my own room the lamp was burning, but the windows of all the other deck-houses were dark, including that of Zavertal, who was sometimes a late sitter.

In less than two minutes I saw my messenger returning alone. "The Spaniard is not in his bunk, sir, or anywhere else in the steward's quarters," he said. "The others know nothing of him, except that he turned in at the usual time, and ought to be in bed."

Under the circumstances this was not only startling, but embarrassing, for I had run into Barcelona for no other reason than to put the stowaway ashore, and there was the boat ready and waiting below. In addition, the fellow's absence from his bed in the middle of the night seemed to lend colour to the vague imputation that he was up to no good on board. I was rapidly debating what was best to be done, when my messenger exclaimed:

"Beg pardon, sir, but there is the man, sir, coming out of the surgery."



"Hi! you there!"

It was true enough. Enriquez was leaving Zavertal's cabin. On seeing us he made a motion as though to slink back again, but, changing his mind, he came boldly along the deck, I suppose, on his way back to his bunk.

"Hi! you there! What are you doing on deck at this time of night?" I asked.

He stopped with a cringing bow, and began to rub his stomach. "Seeck—me very seeck, Señor Capitan. Go Doctor," he whined.

"Very well," I said, "we'll see whether your native air won't cure you. Get down into that boat. I want an interpreter."

I forgot for a moment his limited stock of English, but the gesture with which I accompanied the command made it sufficiently clear, and he evidently understood. Yet there was a certain hesitation in his manner of obeying. He went slowly to the ship's side, casting furtive glances along the deck, and once half turning as if to expostulate or refuse. However, I kept close behind him, letting him see that he had got to go, and he went. Following him down the ladder, I took the tiller, and the boat was soon speeding across the smooth water of the harbour.

I had prepared an envelope containing a blank sheet of paper, and as soon as we reached the landing steps, I gave it and an English sovereign to Enriquez, who had sat silently scowling in the bows. My idea was that if I was doing the man an injustice the money would be useful in taking him to his own place, while in the meanwhile it would help to sustain the fiction I meant to employ.

"Go telegraph office. Send quickly. Then come back here," I said, choosing words that would be most readily intelligible to a foreigner. If he had suspicions on the ship I think my manner must have allayed them now, for he put out his hand for the envelope and the sovereign, and went up the steps on to the quay. The moment he had disappeared I gave the word to row back to the steamer.

"It's all right, my lads," I said, in answer to the honest wonder expressed on the faces of the men as they bent their backs to the oars. "The stowaway is going to get left, that's all. We don't want that kind of cattle on the ship."

"He don't take kindly to it, Captain," replied one of the men. "Whew! look out. He's going to shoot."

We were half-a-dozen boat's lengths from the quay, and, glancing back, I saw the dark form of Enriquez outlined at the top of the landing step. There was a flickering gas-lamp behind him which showed us the glint of a pistol that he held levelled at the boat. Even as we looked, every second expecting the crash of a bullet in our midst, he thought better of it and lowered the weapon, to hurl after me instead a cry of angry menace:

"Next time, Forrester, next time," he shouted. "This is the worst night's work *you* ever did for yourself."

All around was calm and still, and his words rang sharp across the water. They were spoken in excellent English, and in a voice I could have sworn I had heard before—where? I racked my brains all the way back to the steamer to remember.

(To be continued.)

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CORPULENCE

INCREASING POPULARITY OF AN EFFECTUAL CURE.

Many of our readers are, doubtless, familiar with the nature of the extraordinary revolution in the cure of obesity which, within recent years, has been wrought by the original researches of that now eminent expert, Mr. F. Cecil Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C. It is evident that the certainty, the rapidity, and the agreeable surroundings of his curative process have been recognised, in a very large degree, among ladies and gentlemen belonging to the highest social circles. Keen observers who have an opportunity of judging inform us, through the pages of society papers and otherwise, that owing to the general employment of Mr. Russell's treatment extreme obesity is becoming as much a thing of the past, at fashionable gatherings, as intoxication; and, no doubt, it will soon be regarded as nearly as disgraceful. The issue of an eighteenth edition of the author's singularly convincing little text-book, "Corpulency, and the Cure," however, serves to remind us that the popularity of the system has now reached spheres far remote from those of West-end fashion. The book of 256 pages may be had (post-free) by sending six penny stamps to Mr. Russell's offices, as above; and it is worth the careful attention of those who wish to free themselves of a burden of fat—not merely because it is unseemly and adds enormously to the apparent age of the sufferer—but because extreme obesity terribly interferes with the energy necessary in these days of competion to make one's way in the world, or even to earn a very modest competency. A large proportion of the letters of Mr. Russell's grateful correspondents refer to their delight at being enabled—within a very brief period, and without any irksome conditions implying semi-starvation—to attack their accustomed tasks with pleasure instead of wearied disgust, through being reduced to their normal weight. The popularity of the system is also largely due, doubtless, to the English hatred of mystery, which is utterly swept aside by Mr. Russell. He fully explains his modus operandi, and supplies the receipt for his preparation.

"DELIGHTFUL" TREATMENT

FOR CURING

CORPULENCE.

The process of curing any physical disorder is so generally the converse of "delightful" that the use of this and similar terms in reference to Mr. F. C. Russell's now popular treatment for corpulency naturally attracts special attention. These terms are to be found in a large number of the letters included in the just issued 18th edition of Mr. Russell's little volume of 256 pages, "Corpulency, and the Cure" (Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.). These communications are from persons of both sexes, and it is apparent that their number is represented by thousands annually, who have found in this system of treatment a safe, rapid, and permanent cure for excessive fatness. This testimony forms in the aggregate, indeed, a wonderful record of the rapid reduction of excessive adipose tissue, and those who have personal reasons for being interested in the subject should send to the above address six penny stamps for a copy (post free) of Mr. Russell's notably suggestive little book. "I think the treatment most delightful," writes one out of a large number of equally enthusiastic correspondents. And the expressions "Admirable tonic," "Splendid stuff," "A delicious beverage, mixed with mineral waters," are of constant recurrence in this singularly interesting correspondence. The details given by many of the writers of these letters as to the results of the treatment fully justify the use of such eulogistic phrases. It must certainly be delightful to experience the sensation of losing unnecessary and dangerous fat by pounds per week, and frequently stones per month, and that by the aid of treatment which simultaneously increases the appetite and renders its reasonable indulgence innocuous. The experience, too, must be rendered still more delightful by the knowledge, which may be gained from a perusal of Mr. Russell's book, that his preparation is a pure vegetable product, without any admixture of the mineral poisons which are too frequently administered. With a candour which also is delightful, Mr. Russell prints in his book the recipe for the preparation.

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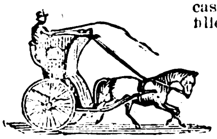

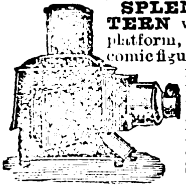

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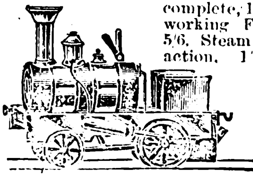

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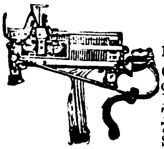

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EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 355. FOR WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 19TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

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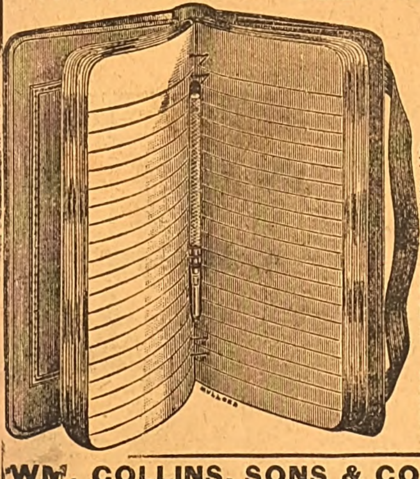

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SHORT STORIES.

ONE PENNY

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 355.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending October 19th, 1895.

A Suspended Elopement.

I HAD loved Bella for more than a year. When I say that I was over twenty-five, my readers of the sterner sex will, I am sure, be impressed by my constancy.

Bella had money. Not that this had, of course, anything to do with my extraordinary devotion, but it served for a time to be the barrier to our happiness. I first met and fell a victim to Bella's charms when her mother was alive. Her father had then been dead several years. The old lady took to me. I have a knack of getting on with old ladies. This is a very useful gift when they are well off, and are the mothers of lovely daughters. I advise all young men to cultivate it. The main point is always to be more attentive to the mother than the daughter.

All was working smoothly for Bella and myself, when cruel Fate, in the shape of a drunken bus-driver, crushed the mother under its Juggernautian wheels. We prosecuted the driver, and an intelligent jury, largely influenced by the wealth of the bus company, decided that pedestrians have no rights which bus drivers are bound to respect.

It turned out that, by her father's will, Bella, in the event of her mother's death, was, until her twenty-first year, to be placed under the guardianship of an uncle, who was a farmer. This same uncle had two great hulking sons, and determined that Bella should marry one or the other. Indeed, he believed he was acting most kindly in giving her a choice, instead of insisting on her taking the first-born.

When old Green found out that I had come into the neighbourhood, and was hanging about the premises, he sternly warned me off, and even hinted at the fierceness and number of the dogs which populated his yard at night. I took his word for the dogs—it was about the only thing I would have taken it for.

Bella was virtually a prisoner. The old farmhouse was three storeys high—a very unusual thing in that part of the country—and she was locked in at night in her room on the top floor. With great difficulty I managed to get one or two letters to her; but so closely was she watched and guarded during the day that speech with her was impossible. I was in despair. There

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was yet a year to run before she could claim release from this guardianship. Was there no means of escape possible?

While I was pondering over this question in the little hotel where I had now been staying some weeks, I heard a strange voice addressed to the proprietor in loud tones, and I distinctly caught the words "portable fire-escape." Instantly an inspiration flashed through my mind. I joined the party, and in doing so heard these words:

"It's just the simplest thing in the world. A two-year-old baby couldn't hurt itself. No, sir, it would like to have one for a plaything, and would amuse itself all day hauling itself to the top of the house and letting itself down again. They're so light and easy that when folks don't want escapes I often sells them as baby-jumpers. Just try one; it's only 22s. 6d. Make it 20s. to you, as an advertisement, seeing you keeps a hotel, and you ought to have one for the protection of your guests."

"No. My place is only two storeys high, and if we have a fire they can jump out or burn, just as they please." And the careful hotel-keeper strolled off.

"What have you there, my friend?" I asked of the stranger.

"A portable fire-escape. Simplest thing in the world. But I was a fool to come to this place. There isn't a house high enough for a man to hurt himself much if he rolled off the roof."

"I'll tell you how you can sell one escape for twenty shillings."

"You will!"

I unfolded my plot, and found a sympathetic listener. He was to go up to Bella's uncle's house, and try to sell an escape. Of course, we knew that would be perfectly hopeless. So, after being rebuffed, he was to insist on leaving one on trial for a week or two, till he came round again. He was also to try to smuggle a letter to Bella, explaining that she was at night to get possession of the escape, attach it to her bedstead, and slide down into my expectant arms, which would be waiting as near as the dogs would let them. On the night she was ready, she was to signal in a certain way with a candle at the window.

The pedlar started off, and soon returned, having been successful in getting the letter to Bella, and having given an exhibition of how to use the escape. For several nights I waited in vain for the signal, but at last it was shown. I did not hear the dogs about, and I gently crept nearly under the window. It was opened.

"Are you there, Bella?" I whispered.

"Yes."

"You're not afraid, dear?"

"Not very. I've tied the end round the bedstead, and I don't think I can slip out of the loops. Have you a trap waiting?"

"Yes, dear; at the first turn of the road."

"Very well. I am going to try now. Oh!"

She had launched herself off from the side, and was descending beautifully.

"Don't come too fast, dear. Use the check rope if you feel you are coming too quickly."

She had got to the second floor, when there was an unaccountable stoppage.

"What's the matter?" I cried.

"It won't move."

"Shake the rope."

"I have."

"Loosen the check."

"It is quite loose."

"Try to pull up a bit."

"I can't; I'm stuck fast."

"Let me shake the rope."

"Try! Oh! oh! it's no use, it won't move."

"Can't you slip out of the loop and slide down the rope? I'll catch you."

"No, I can't. I am sitting in it, and can't get out. Oh, what's to be done?"

"I'll try to climb up and see."

Bella sat dangling in the air, like Mohammed's coffin, between heaven and earth.

I tried to climb, but the rope was not half an inch thick, and I slipped back. Then came the tragic sequel. There was a rush of something behind me, and a bulldog seized me in that part which had been nearest to him as he approached. I have heard of soldiers riddled with bullets, or almost cut to pieces by swords and bayonets, who have still advanced upon the enemy. I don't believe they could have done it with a bulldog hanging on rearward. If any one of my male readers doubts this aspersion of man's courage let him get an angry bulldog and try.

Other dogs began to give tongue. Bella screamed. Lights were seen moving in the house.

"Go!" she cried. "They will kill you if they find you."

"But I could not leave you, Bella." I must own this was not true. I was leaving her in small sections down the dog's throat, and I felt I must run away.

"Go; save yourself."

By a convulsive effort I shook off the dog, a considerable portion of my trousers, and a couple of good mouthfuls of my anatomy, and bounded over a wall and up a tree. From there I watched the triumphant brothers haul Bella into a second storey window. Then they came out and began to look for me. I am happy to say they were unsuccessful. About two hours afterwards I ventured to limp home.

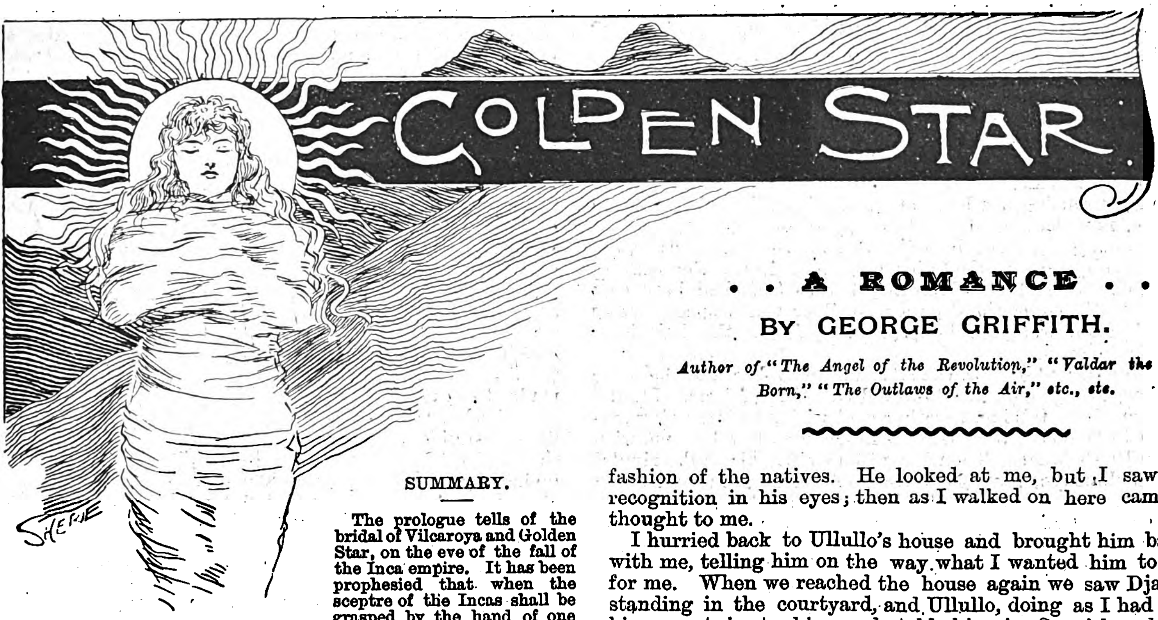
Bella never tried to elope again. She remained proof against all the arguments of her uncle and the charms of his boys, and when she became legally her own mistress, she became mine legally, too.

I never saw that fire-escape man again. Perhaps it was better for him I didn't. He never called for his machine. Possibly he heard something of the story in his travels.

I don't know that there is any moral to this tale, except never to use a rope fire-escape for an elopement. There must have been something pathetic in the instinct of the author of the old song when he wrote:

When a lady elopes
Down a ladder of ropes,
She may go to Hong-Kong for me.

JULIAN MAGNUS.



GOLDEN STAR.

. . A ROMANCE . .

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

The prologue tells of the bridal of Vilcaroya and Golden Star, on the eve of the fall of the Inca empire. It has been prophesied that when the sceptre of the Incas shall be grasped by the hand of one who has been dead, and is alive again, the ancient glories of their empire shall be restored, and they dare the ordeal together. Three hundred years later Professor Martin Lamson brings to England a mummy from Peru. Laurens Djama undertakes to restore it to animation. The mummy is removed to Djama's laboratory, and in a week he shows the Professor his mummy alive. They learn that he is the Vilcaroya of the legend. He promises them that if they will restore Golden Star to life he will give them untold treasures. Six months later the party embark for Peru. They meet in Panama a friend of Professor Lamson, Captain Hartness, who joins their party. On the way Hartness is told the whole story, and throws in his lot with the Inca. With Book II. begins Vilcaroya's personal narrative of his return to his own country. He enters into communication with the Ayllos, the remnant of the old Inca nobility, and commissions one of them, Tupac-Rayca, to meet him at night on the plain of the Rodadero, behind the Great Fortress, with twenty Men of the Blood, to see the proof of his mission. The same evening at dinner he accidentally reveals the fact that Golden Star is his sister as well as his bride, and, after Ruth has left the room in horror at this revelation, the Professor and Hartness show him how impossible such a union is in the modern world. He then goes out to think and prepare himself for his night's work.

CHAPTER XI.

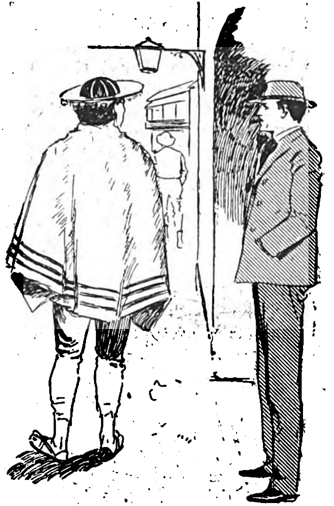
ON THE RODADERO.

As it still wanted more than three hours to the time of my meeting Tupac and those he was to bring with him on the plain of the Rodadero, as it is now called, I had plenty of time before me to ponder the to me strange and fateful words that I had heard at our dinner-table. I went first to Ullullo's house and changed my clothing so that I might the more readily lose myself among the hundreds of Indians about the streets of the city, for something told me that Djama might make an attempt to discover the meaning of what I had said about the house by following me and learning, if possible, the secret of my movements; for he must have known that being without money, as I was, save for the few dollars that the Professor had lent me, it would not be possible for me to do as I had said unless one at least of the hiding-places of the old treasures was within easy reach, so that I could take sufficient gold out of it by the next day to fulfil my promise.

When I changed my clothes I put a dagger into my belt and a revolver, which Francis Hartness had already taught me how to use, into a case slung at my hip and hidden by my jacket and the long folds of my poncho. Then I went back into the great square and across it up the street in which we had our lodgings. As I passed the house I saw Djama standing in the archway leading into the courtyard smoking a cigar. I turned and looked him in the face as I went by, slouching and trailing my sandalled feet after the fashion of the natives. He looked at me, but I saw no recognition in his eyes; then as I walked on here came a thought to me.

I hurried back to Ullullo's house and brought him back with me, telling him on the way what I wanted him to do for me. When we reached the house again we saw Djama standing in the courtyard, and Ullullo, doing as I had bid him, went in to him and told him in Spanish, which I could not speak, that if he would give him ten dollars he should learn the secret of my goings and comings, and where I was to find the gold with which to pay for the hacienda. Djama instantly promised him the money, as I thought he would, and Ullullo told him to be at the end of the street, which is now called El Triunfo, at eleven o'clock that night. He was to come alone, for if any one came with him he would learn nothing. As you will soon see, I had two objects to serve in doing this.

When Ullullo came back and told me that Djama would be there, I told him to wait for me at the same place and hour, and then I went away alone out of the city and up a path which led towards the mountains to the north. There alone and in silence I communed with my own soul, at first in sorrow, yet slowly becoming more and more peaceful in heart, even as one who is told that he is to die on a certain day first rages against his doom, and then learns to contemplate with calmness that which there is no hope of escaping. The words of the Professor and Francis Hartness had shown me that in the world to which I had returned my sister, Golden Star, could now never be my wife and queen, and the more I pondered on what they had said, the more plainly it appeared to me that this was the truth, however bitter it might seem.



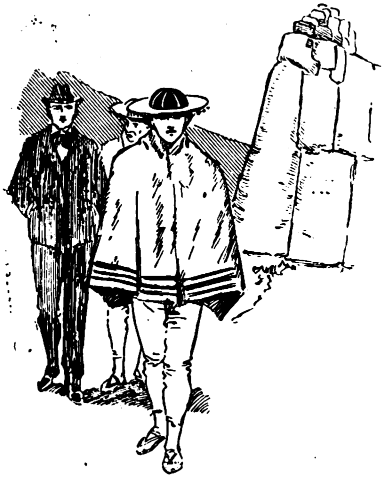
I saw Djama standing in the archway.

Yet there was something else in my heart, although at that time I did not dare even to let my inmost thoughts dwell upon it, which in some way dulled the pain of the blow that had fallen upon me, and reconciled me to the parting which in one sense must now be eternal. The longer I pondered the more deeply did that look of horror which I had seen in the eyes of Joyful Star burn into my soul, and the more clearly did the words that she had said ring in my ears. She had said that it was horrible, and that it was impossible, and she was to me as one of those bright angels who, according to our ancient faith, awaited the heroes and sages of our race in the Mansions of the Sun—a being so far above me that I could look upon her only as a mortal might look from afar upon the daughters of the celestials.

Thus musing in silence and solitude on the wild mountain side, now looking back into my distant past, and now hazarding a glance into the fast approaching future, the hours slipped by quickly for me, and I heard the bells of the churches—bells which they had told me had been cast out of the copper and gold and silver that the conquerors had taken from our temples and palaces—the half hour before eleven.

So I turned back to the city, and made haste to the place where Djama and Ullullo would be waiting for me. I found them there talking together, and without discovering myself to Djama, I told Ullullo in Quichua to follow me with the Englishman. Then I went on swiftly along the rivulet of Tullamayo, past the terrace of Rocca Inca, and along the smooth dark wall of what had once been the Yachahuasi, or College of the Youths, and so out of the city and the gorge of the little river Rodadero. Then, with the two still following me a few yards behind, I climbed the lower terraces of the Colcompata, or the Granaries, where the divine Manco-Capac built his first palace, and then on up the hillside to the Tiupunco, or Gate of Sand, which led through the fragments of what had once been the outer wall of the great fortress, and so on to the little level pampa of the Rodadero, which was my meeting place with Tupac.

Now as I went I began to sing one of our ancient songs, which was the signal that I had agreed upon with Tupac, and presently, one after another, silent, stealthy forms crept out from the angles of the great zig-zag wall and came towards me. One of them, taller than the rest, threw an iron bar that he was carrying across his shoulders, and came and stood before me with bowed-down head, waiting for me to speak. I knew that it was Tupac, and I said to him:



Then I went swiftly along.

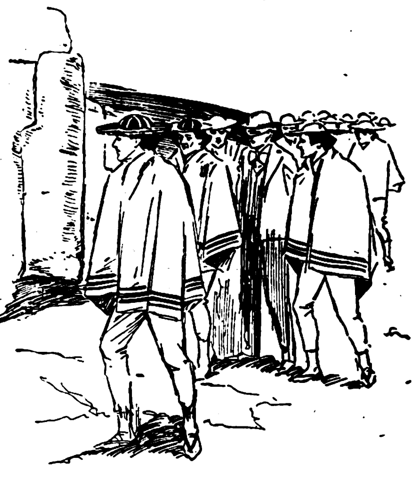
"Are the Children of the Sun ready to do the bidding of His Son?"

"They are, lord," he replied. "Here are twenty who have sworn by the heart of the divine Manco to do all things lawful and unlawful, even to the death, at the bidding of him who shall prove himself to be the true heir of the royal Llautu."

"It is well," I said, "and the proof shall soon be given. Now take the stranger yonder; do him no harm, but bind his eyes so that he cannot see, and tie his hands behind him. Then follow me."

Instantly the stealthy forms closed around Djama. Not a word was spoken save his startled, angry exclamation, which was soon stifled, and then they brought him along after me, I going first and Tupac following close behind me. Like a string of shadows we moved across the plain past the great carved rock which is still called the Inca's Seat, and over the ridge of the Sliding Stones and down into the valley beyond, which is thickly strewn with great rock masses carved into seats, and altars, and baths, and chambers, of which no man knows the origin, and which were ancient when Manco-Capac and Mama-Occlu first came into the land.

The greatest of these is a high white rock carved all over into steps, and seats, and altars, and basins, which are said to have been made to catch the blood of the living sacrifices that were offered up here by a race of men whose name has been forgotten. It is called in our language the Sayacusca, or Tired Stone, for an old tradition says that ages ago it was brought from the mountains by the toil of ten thousand men, and when it reached its present place it rolled over and killed three hundred of them, and could never be moved again upon its journey.

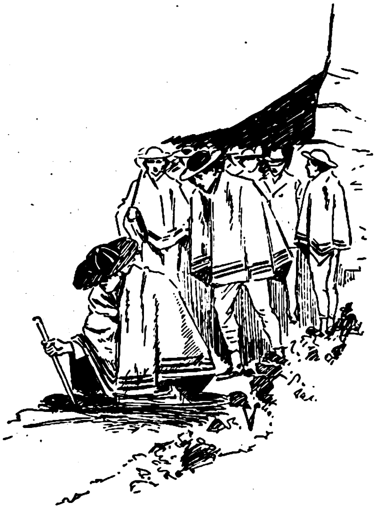


They brought him along after me.

On the south side of this there is a great cleft from the top to the bottom, and up the sides of this cleft are the two halves of a stairway, which was carved there before some earthquake rent the stone in twain, and under this is a deep dark pool of water. At the entrance to the cleft I stopped and beckoned to the others to come round me. Then I told them that they were about to see that which no man then alive on earth had ever seen, and made all swear by the Glory of the Sun that each and every one of them would slay without pity him who revealed anything seen or heard that night, even though he were his own brother, or his own father, or his own son. As for Djama, they held him there bound and blindfolded amongst them, and when he tried to speak they stopped his mouth at my bidding, for I told them that I would be answerable for him since I had brought him here for my own purposes.

Then I made two of the men stretch a cord tightly across the mouth of the cleft close down to the ground, and to the middle of this I tied another cord, and stretched it out straight twelve foot-lengths from the centre, and here I bade them clear away the bushes and dig. Then axe, and hoe, and spade went to work. In that clear air, and under that cloudless sky, the stars gave light enough to work by, and soon a space had been cleared, and a round hole about three feet across was being dug down through the loose, rocky soil. When it was about half the depth of a man, the spades struck on the living rock below, and could go no farther. When Tupac told me of this, I, who had been standing by the cleft, looking—full of strange thoughts—down into the dark pool of water, called the man who had been digging out of the hole, and, taking an iron bar from Tupac, I dropped it into it.

I sought about the bottom with my hands for a few moments till I found the outline of a squared stone that had been let into the rock. In the centre of this I found a hole, out of which I picked the dirt with my dagger. Then, putting the end of my iron bar into it, I pulled, and the stone turned over on a hinge, leaving an opening half its size. Down this I thrust my arm, and found a chain of copper which hung down into a deep well below. I pulled this with all my strength until something gave way at the bottom, then I drew the chain up, and cast my iron bar under it across the hole. As I did this, I heard the deep smothered roar of waters rushing away far below me into the bowels of the earth.


Taking an iron bar from Tupac, I dropped it into it.

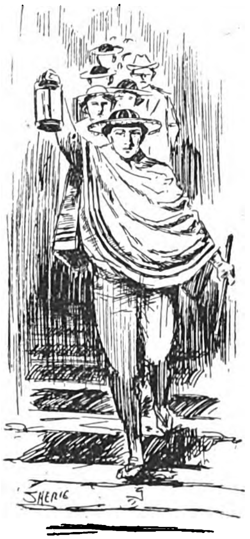
Then I got out of the hole and went back to the cleft. I lit a candle, and looked down at the pool. It was no longer stagnant now, but seething and eddying like a whirlpool. I beckoned to Tupac, who was standing a little way behind me, and as he came and looked over my shoulder I pointed down into the dark gulf, out of which the bottom was rapidly falling, and said:

"See, the waters are opening the way by which the Son of the Sun shall go into his kingdom. Watch now and listen."

"Son of the Sun and Lord of the Four Regions, it is true," he whispered, as the waters eddied round faster and faster, and gurgled and rattled down into some unknown abyss. Soon they vanished altogether, leaving only a dark, black, and seemingly fathomless cavern in the place where they had been. I waited until the sound of the last gurgle had died away in the distance, and then I turned to Tupac, and said:

"The way is open. Tell Ullullo to bring the lantern and light it. There must be no other light. You and the rest follow me, and let two strong men bring the stranger."

He did as I bade him, and when I had lit the lantern I cast its rays about the gulf beneath me till I found the continuation of the broken stairway above, and then, picking my way carefully down the dank, slimy steps, I led the way into the heart of the rock, the rest following, guided by the spreading ray of light in front of me. I counted fifty steps, and then stopped and turned sharply to the right. The fiftieth step ended against a wall of rock, still dripping with the water that was running down from the arched roof of the chamber. I measured ten spans with my hand from the wall where the steps ended, and made a mark with my dagger on the rock. Then from the floor I measured eight spans in a line across the mark. Where the eighth span ended I made another mark, and, with the help of my lantern, I found a silver socket let into the rock. It was a plate with a hole in the centre large enough to admit the iron bar which I had brought for the purpose. I put it in, and, whispering to Tupac to help me, we gripped the bar, and, after two or three hard pulls, felt it coming towards us. A great slab of rock, which fitted into the wall with all the perfection that our old Inca masons could give it, turned on a central hinge, leaving a space that two men could have walked through abreast.


I led the way into the heart of the rock.

"Go in," I said to Tupac, "and let all follow you."

He obeyed, and standing by the opening, with a ray of my lantern shooting across it, I watched them file past one by one until all had gone in. Then I followed, and, as I crossed the threshold, set my shoulder against the edge of the slab and pushed it back into its place.

CHAPTER XII.

The Hall of Gold.

Now I covered my lantern with my poncho and cried aloud in the darkness:

"Let the torches be got ready, but let no light be struck till that which is to be revealed may be seen."

A low murmur answered me, and then, still keeping my lantern hidden, I felt my way along the wall, treading softly as a mountain lion approaching its prey, until I had counted forty paces. The fortieth brought me to a doorway, through which I turned. Five paces more brought me to another turning, ten more to the end of the passage, and then I uncovered my light, and found myself in a little square chamber hewn out of the rock and surrounded with stone chests covered with lids of copper.

In the centre of the chamber stood a smaller one, all of metal. I set my lantern down on one of the others so that the light fell across this one; then I raised the lid, and there before me lay, perfect as they had been on the day when Anda-Huillac, last High Priest of the Sun, had laid them there, the imperial robes and insignia that had last been worn by the ill-fated Huascar, son of the great Huayni-Capac. Quickly throwing off the mean garments that I wore, I dressed myself in them. Then, binding the golden sandals on my feet, and clasping the long mantle emblazoned in gold and jewels with the symbols of the Sun and his sister-wife the Moon across my shoulders, I wound the scarlet Llautu around my head with the crimson fringe of the Borla interlaced with gold falling upon my brow, and then closing the chest I took up my lantern and went back along the passages I had traversed.

In the middle of the last one I put my lantern down with the glass against the wall, and feeling my way into the doorway which opened on to the chamber in which the others were awaiting me, I cried in a voice that echoed strangely through the great chamber:

"Let the torches be kindled, and let the Children of the Sun look upon their lord."

I heard a scuffling of feet and a whispering of many voices. Then lights were struck, and I stepped back quickly into the shadow of the doorway. I saw the glow of light grow into a glare that was flashed back in a thousand many-coloured rays from the walls of the chamber. I heard a deep low cry of wonder, and then I strode out into the midst and said:

"I am he who went into the shadows at the bidding of our Father the Sun, and by His will I have returned to bring deliverance to His children."

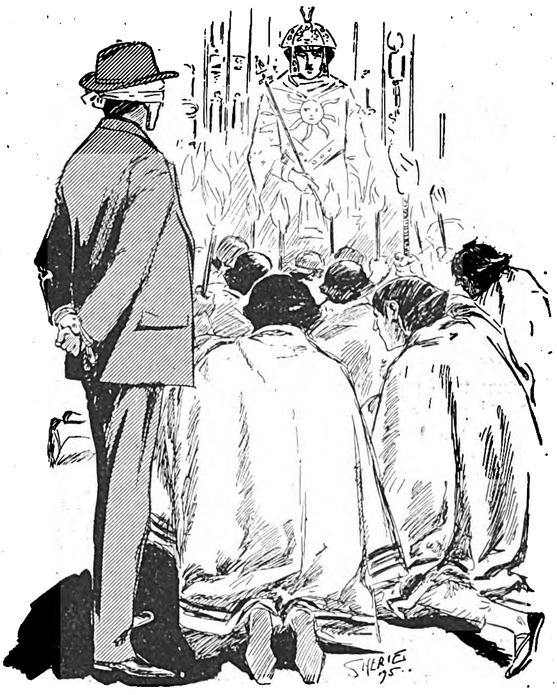
For one moment of affrighted amazement they stared wide-eyed at me standing there before them as though Huayni-Capac himself had returned from the Mansions of the Sun to resume his sceptre and his crown. Then with one accord they sank on their knees before me, holding their torches above their bent heads and murmuring:

"Hail Son of the Sun and deliverer of His children, who hast come to bring the daylight back to the long darkened Land of the Four Regions."

I looked at them, and saw Djama standing erect still bound and blindfold in the midst of them. I went through the kneeling forms to him, and, taking the bandage from his eyes, stepped back, and, while he was blinking at the light of the torches, said to him in English:

"Look about you, Laurens Djama, and tell me if you believe now that I, the friend of the filthy Indians whom you despise, can do that which I have said?"

Still half dazzled by the glare of the torches and the thousand rays of many colours that were flashed back from all sides, he stared about him. Wherever his wondering glance fell it saw great golden plates covering the walls, thick set with jewels, and in front of him, piled up against the end wall of the chamber, a shining heap of golden bars built up in the shape of a pyramid reaching to the roof of the chamber, and on either side of this, half way up, was a great image of the sun like to that which in the olden times stood above the altar in the sanctuary of the great temple of Cuzco, each with its centre fashioned as a human face with great flashing diamonds for eyes, with lips of rubies, and long pendants of emeralds hanging from the ears and all round a hundred curving rays of gold edged and lined with jewels.



"Hail, Son of the Sun!"

He stared about him open-eyed and open-mouthed with amazement. Then his eyes fell on me, and he started forward and stared me in the face for a moment. Then he gasped:

"Vilcaroya, is it you, or am I dreaming? Where have you brought me to?"

"To one of the treasure-houses that you so longed to see," I said, "so that you might see and believe that I told you no idle tale, and that I can perform my promise if you can perform yours."

Then I turned my back on him and went to the foot of the pyramid. In front of it stood the golden throne from which twenty generations of Incas, my forefathers, had given laws to their people. I, the last of their sons, sat down upon it and said to those who still knelt before me in silence:

"Let those of His children who are faithful to their Father, the Sun, rise and come without falsehood in their hearts, and say if they now believe that that which was foretold long ago when the darkness fell over the land, has in very truth come to pass."

They rose from their knees and came towards me in a half circle, carrying their torches. They stopped about five paces from the throne, looking at me through a little space with wondering eyes full of worship. Then they bowed their heads again, and Tupac came from the midst of them, and, casting himself prone at my feet, yet not daring even to touch my sandals, said in a broken voice:

"Son of the Sun, heir of heaven and lord of earth, we have seen thy wisdom and thy majesty. None but one of thy royal line, nay, none but thee, oh, Vilcaroya, Son of Huayni-Capac, and Brother of Huascar, last of the Incas, could have known the secret that thou hast brought with thee from the past into the present. We are thy children and thy slaves, and all the men of the Blood that are left in the Land of the Four Regions shall hail thee lord as we do, and own no other master save thee, Vilcaroya Inca, from now until the hour when their father, the Lord of Life, shall call them back to the Mansions of the Sun. We are thine, and we will serve thee, ourselves and our wives and our children, as our fathers served thy father in the days when there was yet peace and happiness in the land."

"And if ye are but faithful," I said, "and if the Lord, my father, who rules the day, and his sister, my mother, who rules the night, shall give me strength and wisdom to use the power that is mine, I will give you back peace and happiness, and the stranger and the oppressor shall be driven from the land and the homes of the Children of the Sun shall again be full of light. Rise now, Tupac, and let ten of the men give their torches to the others and make ready to do my bidding."

He rose, and it was done. Then I called Djama to me and said:

"What you have seen here to-night is a dream. When your eyes open again on the outer world, remember what I have said. Your hand has brought me from the grave to the throne, and you must obey me as these do. Let me but know that you have spoken one word, even to Joyful Star herself, concerning what you have seen here to-night, and I will show you how an Inca deals with one who dares to disobey him. Keep silence, and have patience, and perform that which you have promised, and you shall go back to your own land loaded with gold and jewels. Fail, and the fragments of your body shall be sent north and south and east and west throughout the Land of the Four Regions, and your name shall be one of shame in the ears of my people for ever."

For a moment he looked me in the eyes, and I saw his lips moving as though he was striving to shape some answer to my words. Then his face grew grey, and his knees shook as he stood. Then I called to Tupac, and bade him bind his eyes again and lead him away, and as soon as his sight was taken from him I bade the ten men who had given up their torches take off their ponchos and fill them with as many of the golden bars as each one could carry, and when this was done I ordered all the torches save one to be extinguished. This one I took, and went with it into the passage where I had left my lantern. Then I dashed it against the wall and vanished into the darkness.

I took my lantern, and, hiding the light carefully, went back to the little chamber, where I took off my robes and sandals and the imperial Llautu, and put them back into the chest. Then I put on my mean attire again and went back into the Hall of Gold. Signing to the others to follow me, I turned the stone door on its pivot again, and watched them file past me as before. Then, going out last, I closed the portal after me and lighted them up the steps with my lantern.

When we all once more stood in the open air by the cleft I went to the hole and released the chain. Instantly the roar of waters broke out again, and I bade them fill the hole up and put turf over it, and trample it down and scatter the bushes over it; and, that being done, we took our way back again across the plain towards the fortress, still leading Djama blindfold in our midst.

We took him by the gate of Viracocha into the fortress, across its upper part where the three crosses stood, and down on to the zigzag road which leads into the eastern part of the city, and there we unbound his eyes, and I bade him go to the house and make ready to receive me early in the morning, telling our friends that I should arrive with some packages of Indian merchandise and metals from one of my mines, for, as I should have told you before, I had come to Cuzco in the same character as that in which I had first been introduced to Francis Hartness—an owner of mines who had lived long in Europe and had come back to supervise the working of my property.

I and Tupac and his companions then went back into the hills, and, without entering the city, made our way by twos and threes into the village of San Sebastian. We met at Tupac's house, and there I explained to them as much of my plans and purposes as I thought fit for them to know, and showed them that the time was not yet come for them to make use of the treasures that I would share with them. But to each man I gave two pounds' weight of gold to be left in Tupac's care till it could be taken into the cities of the south and there changed for silver coins. Then I had a list made of their names, and promised them, after reminding them of their oaths, that when I once more sat on the throne of the divine Manco, their fidelity should be well remembered.

The next morning we loaded the gold in bales of the coca leaf, great quantities of which are taken every day into Cuzco, upon four mules, and of these I sent to our house while I went back with Ullullo and put on my English clothing. Then I followed, and found that the bags of coca had already arrived. They were carried up to my own room, and there, in the presence of Djama and Joyful Star, the Professor and Francis Hartness, I took out the gold ingots and built them up in a pyramid before them.

I could see from their amazement that, whether from fear or faith, Djama had obeyed me, and said nothing of what he had seen during the night. As for me, I said but little. I gave them the gold, and that day the Professor and Djama, acting as my agents, sold it to some of the merchants of Cuzco as the product of my mines. The price was more than twice as much as was needed for the hacienda, so with the rest I discharged my debt and made myself once more a free man.

There is no need for me to dwell upon our dealings with the owner of the hacienda, and, therefore, it will suffice for me to say, before ten days more had passed, the purchase money had been paid, we had taken up our abode there, and installed Joyful Star as housewife with faithful servants chosen by myself from among the children of the blood. Djama, who had been strangely silent and reserved with all of us since the lesson I had taught him in the Hall of Gold, had taken possession of the chamber which was devoted to his uses, and had put all his apparatus in order for the great work that was to be done there.

So on the fourteenth day, such was the power of my gold and of my longings, all things were ready, and at daybreak on the fifteenth day we rode, at the head of our little mule-train, out of the courtyard of the hacienda on our way to the resting-place of Golden Star.

(To be continued.)

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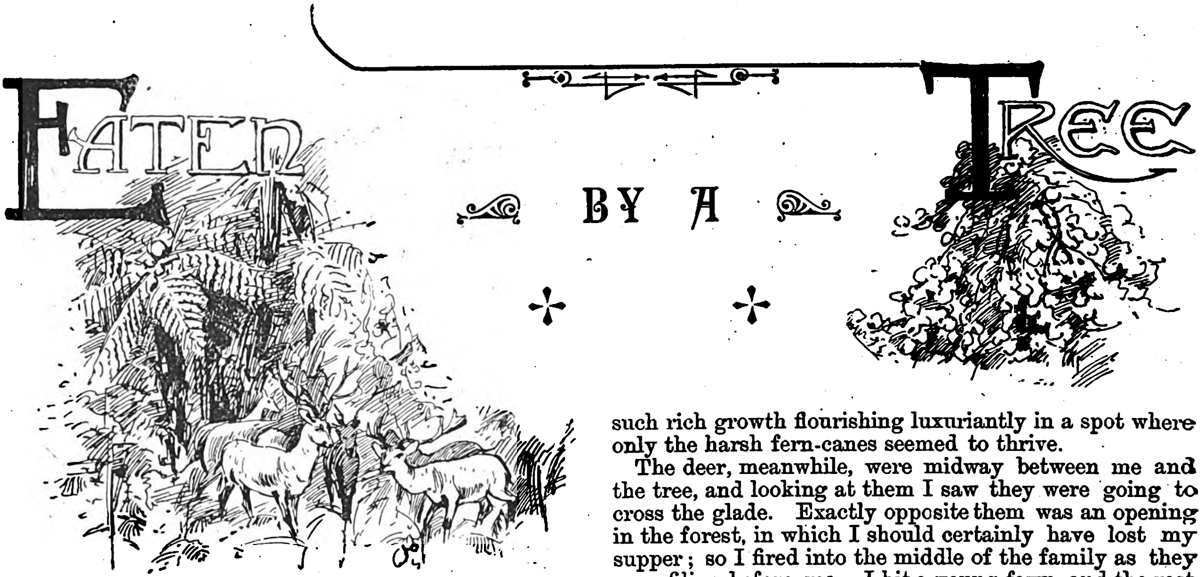

EATEN BY A TREE

Before committing this paper to the ridicule of the readers of *Short Stories*—for many, I fear, will be inclined to regard this story as incredible—I would venture on the expression of an opinion regarding credulity, which I do not remember to have met before. It is this. Placing supreme Wisdom and supreme Unwisdom at two extremes, and myself in the exact mean between them, I am surprised to find that, whether I travel towards the one extreme or the other, the credulity of those I meet increases. To put it as a paradox—*whether a man be more foolish or wiser than I am, he is more credulous.* I make this remark to point out to those whose notice it may have escaped, that credulity is not of itself shameful or contemptible, and that it depends upon the manner rather than the matter of their belief whether they gravitate towards the sage or the reverse way. According, therefore, to the incredibility found in the following, the reader may measure, as pleases him, his wisdom or his unwisdom:

Many years ago I turned my restless steps towards Central Africa, and made the journey from where the Senegal empties itself into the Atlantic, to the Nile, skirting the Great Desert, and reaching Nubia on my way to the eastern coast.

I had with me then three native attendants—two of them brothers, the third, Otona, a young savage from the gaboon uplands, a mere lad in his teens; and one day, leaving my mule with the two men, who were pitching my tent for the night, I went on with my gun, the boy accompanying me towards a fern forest which I saw in the distance.

As I approached it I found the forest was cut into two by a wide glade; and, seeing a small herd of the common antelope—an excellent beast in the pot—browsing along the shaded side, I crept after them. Though ignorant of their real danger the herd was suspicious, and, slowly trotting along before me, enticed me for a mile or more along the verge of the fern growths.

Turning a corner I suddenly became aware of a solitary tree growing in the middle of the glade—one tree alone. It struck me at once that I had never seen a tree exactly like it before; but, being intent upon venison for my supper, I looked at it only long enough to satisfy my first surprise at seeing a single plant of such rich growth flourishing luxuriantly in a spot where only the harsh fern-canes seemed to thrive.

The deer, meanwhile, were midway between me and the tree, and looking at them I saw they were going to cross the glade. Exactly opposite them was an opening in the forest, in which I should certainly have lost my supper; so I fired into the middle of the family as they were filing before me. I hit a young fawn, and the rest of the herd, wheeling round in their terror, made off in the direction of the tree, leaving the fawn struggling on the ground.

Otona, the boy, ran forward at my order to secure it, but the little creature seeing him coming, attempted to follow its comrades, and at a fair pace held on their course. The herd had meanwhile reached the tree, but suddenly, instead of passing under it, swerved in their career, and swept round it at some yards distance.

Was I mad, or did the tree really try to catch the deer? On a sudden I saw, or thought I saw, the tree violently agitated, and while the ferns all round were standing motionless in the still evening air, its boughs were swayed by some sudden impulse towards the herd, and swept almost to the ground. I drew my hand across my eyes, closed them for a moment, and looked again. The tree was as motionless as myself!

Towards it, and now close to it, the boy was running in excited pursuit of the fawn. He stretched out his hands to catch the animal. It bounded from his eager grasp. Again he reached forward, and again it escaped him. There was another rush forward, and the next instant boy and deer were beneath the tree.

And now there was no mistaking what I saw.

The tree was convulsed with motion. It leant forward, swept its thick-foliaged boughs to the ground, and enveloped from my sight the pursuer and the pursued: I was within a hundred yards, and the cry of Otona from the midst of the tree came to me in all the clearness of its agony. There was then one stifled scream, and except for the agitation of the leaves where they had closed upon the boy, there was not a sign of life.

I called out "Otona"! No answer came. I tried to call out again, but my utterance was like that of some wild beast smitten at once with sudden terror and its death-wound. I stood there, changed from all semblance of a human being. Not all the terrors of earth together could have made me take my eye from the awful plant, or my foot off the ground. I must have stood thus for at least an hour, for the shadows had crept out from the forest half across the glade before that hideous paroxysm of fear left me.

My first impulse then was to creep stealthily away, lest the tree should perceive me, but my returning reason bade me approach it. The boy might have fallen into the lair of some beast of prey, or it might be the terrible life in the tree was that of some great serpent among its branches. Preparing to defend myself, I approached the silent tree, the harsh grass crisping beneath my feet with a strange loudness, the cicadas in the forest shrilling till the air seemed throbbing round me with waves of sound. The terrible truth was soon before me in all its awful novelty.

The vegetable first discovered my presence at about fifty yards distance. I then became aware of a stealthy motion among the thick-lipped leaves, reminding me of some wild beast slowly gathering itself up from a long sleep, a vast coil of snakes in restless motion. Have you ever seen bees hanging from a bough—a great cluster of bodies, bee clinging to bee—and by striking the bough or agitating the air, caused that massed life to begin sulkily to disintegrate, each insect asserting its individual right to move? And do you remember how, without one bee leaving the cluster, the whole became gradually instinct with sullen life, and horrid with multitudinous motion?

When I came within twenty yards of it, the tree was quivering through every branch, muttering for blood, and, helpless with rooted feet, yearning with every branch towards me. It was that terror of the deep sea which the men of the northern fjords dread, and which, anchored upon some sunken rock, stretches into space its longing arms, pellucid as the sea itself, and as relentless.

Each separate leaf was agitated and hungry. Like hands they fumbled together, their fleshy palms curling upon themselves and again unfolding, closing on each other and falling apart again—thick, helpless, fingerless hands (rather lips or tongues than hands), dimpled closely with little cup-like hollows. I approached nearer and nearer, step by step, till I saw that these soft horrors were all of them in motion, opening and closing incessantly.

I was now within ten yards of the farthest reaching bough. Every part of it was hysterical with excitement. The agitation of its members was awful—sickening yet fascinating. In an ecstasy of eagerness for the food so near them, the leaves turned upon each other. Two, meeting, would suck together face to face, with a force that compressed their joint thickness to a half, thinning the two leaves into one; and at last, faint with the violence of the paroxysm, would separate, falling apart as leeches gorged drop off the limbs.

A sticky dew glistened in the dimples, welled over, and trickled down the leaf. The sound of it dripping from leaf to leaf made it seem as if the tree were muttering to itself. The beautiful golden fruit as they swung here and there were clutched now by one leaf, and now by another, held for a moment close enfolded from the sight, and then as suddenly released.

I watched the terrible struggle till my starting eyes, strained by intense attention, refused their office, and I can hardly say what I saw. But the tree before me seemed to have become a live beast. Above me, I felt conscious, was a great limb, and each of its thousand clammy hands reached downward towards me, fumbling. It strained, shivered, rocked, and heaved. It flung itself about in despair. The boughs, tantalised to madness with the presence of flesh, were tossed to this side and to that, in the agony of a frantic desire. The leaves were wrung together as the hands of one driven to madness by sudden misery. I felt the vile dew spurting from the tense veins fall upon me. My clothes began to give out a strange odour.

Was I bewildered by terror? Had my senses abandoned me in my need? I know not—but the tree seemed to me to be alive. Leaning over towards me, it seemed to be pulling up its roots from the softened ground, and to be moving. A mountainous monster, with myriad lips, mumbling together for my life, was upon me!

Like one who desperately defends himself from imminent death, I made an effort for life, and fired my gun at the approaching horror. To my dazed senses the sound seemed far off, but the shock of the recoil partially recalled me to myself, and starting back, I reloaded. The shot had torn their way into the soft body of the great thing. The trunk, as it received the wound, shuddered, and the whole tree was struck with a sudden quiver. A fruit fell down—slipping from the leaves, now rigid with swollen veins, as from carven foliage.

Then I saw a large arm slowly droop, and without a sound it was severed from the juice-fattened bole, and sank down softly, noiselessly, through the glistening leaves. I fired again, and another vile fragment was powerless—*dead*. At each discharge the terrible vegetable yielded a life. Piecemeal I attacked it, killing here a leaf and there a branch. My fury increased with the slaughter till, when my ammunition was exhausted, the giant was left a wreck—as if some hurricane had torn through it.

On the ground lay heaped together the fragments, struggling, rising, gasping, and falling. Over them drooped in dying languor a few stricken boughs, while upright in the midst stood, dripping at every joint, the glistening trunk.

My continued firing had brought up one of my men on my mule. He dared not (so he told me) come near me, thinking me mad. I had now drawn my hunting knife, and with this was fighting with the leaves. But each leaf was instinct with a horrid life; and more than once I felt my hand entangled for a moment, and seized as if by sharp lips. Ignorant of the presence of my companion, I made a rush forward over the fallen foliage, and with a last paroxysm of frenzy, drove my knife up to the handle into the soft bole, and, slipping on the fast congealing sap, fell exhausted and unconscious, among the still panting leaves.

My companion carried me back to the camp, and after vainly searching for Otona, awaited my return to consciousness. Two or three hours elapsed before I could speak, and several days before I could approach the terrible thing. My men would not go near it. It was quite dead; for as we came up, a great-billed bird, with gaudy plumage, that had been securely feasting on the decaying fruit, flew up from the wreck.

We removed the rotting foliage, and there among the dead leaves, still limp with juices, and piled round the roots, we found the ghastly relics of many former meals, and—its last nourishment—the corpse of little Otona. To have removed the leaves would have taken too long, so we buried the body, as it was, with a hundred vampire leaves still clinging to it.

Peter Parr.

First Number of the New Series of
FOOTLIGHT FAVOURITES
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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25th.

Forged = Together.

A WILD TALE OF THE MUTUAL HATRED OF TWO CONVICTS.

I AM French by birth, and my name is François Thierry. I will not burden you with my early history, but will begin by stating that I was sent to the galleys, and find myself to-day in exile. Branding was not out of date at that time, and until my death I shall bear some fiery letters on my shoulder.

I was arrested, registered, condemned, and sent to Paris. As I left the court of justice, my terrible sentence rang in my ears. On the long road from Paris to Bicètre—all day and all night—till we arrived at Toulon, the dull rolling of the prison waggon on the pavement repeated it to me. When I look back to that time, I think I must have been stunned by the unexpected severity of my doom, for I have not the slightest recollection of the particulars of that journey. "Hard labour for life!" "Hard labour for life!" I heard nothing else. Late in the afternoon of the third day the waggon stopped, the door was unlocked, and I was led through a paved court into a hall that was but faintly lighted. Here an officer asked me my name, which he entered in a large book, banded with iron as though it were fettered.

"No. 207!" cried the officer, "green!"

Then I was led into another room, where I put on the uniform of a galley slave. From this moment I lost my individuality. I was no longer François Thierry, but No. 207. The officer was present while I was dressing.

"Hurry up!" he said; "it is getting late, and you must be married before dinner."

"Married?" I repeated.

He laughed as he lit a cigar. I was again led through another corridor into a damp court, where wild-looking men, with clanking chains, were walking up and down before the muzzles of cannon.

"Bring No. 206," cried the officer, "and then call the priest." No. 206 came in, dragging a heavy chain behind him, and with him a robust blacksmith.

The ring of an iron chain was put round my ankle, and forged together with a single stroke of the hammer. A like ring bound me to my companion. Each stroke re-echoed through the arches like the scornful laugh of demons. The officer drew a small red book from his pocket, and said:

"No. 207, listen to our prison laws: If you attempt flight and fail, you will be bastinadoed. If you succeed in getting to the harbour and are there captured, you will be doubly chained for three years. As soon as you are missed three cannon-shots will be fired and signals of alarm will be hoisted on each bastion. Telegraphic messages will be sent to the harbour-guards and to the police throughout France."

After the officer had read this with a terrible satisfaction, he re-lit his cigar, put the book away, and left the hall. I was now a prisoner forged to another prisoner. As I looked at him I found his eyes turned towards me. He was a sinister-looking fellow, about forty years old, not any taller than I, but of herculean build.

"Then you, too, are in for life?" he said.

"How do you know that?" I exclaimed angrily.

"I can tell by your cap—green is for life. Why are you here?"

"I conspired against the Government."

He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "Then you're an elegant one. We other prisoners hate such aristocratic company."

I made no answer.

"This is the fourth time that I've been here," continued my companion. "Perhaps you have heard of Gasparo, the counterfeiter?"

I had heard of the daring criminal, and drew back tremblingly from his gaze. An uneasy look in his eyes told me that he noticed my shrinking.

From that moment he hated me. Gasparo and I, with two hundred other prisoners, were put to work in a stone quarry on the other side of the harbour. Day after day, week after week, from sunrise to sunset, the rock resounded to our blows. Thus spring and summer passed and autumn came.

My fellow-prisoner was a Piedmontese. He had been a thief, counterfeiter, incendiary, and when he last fled from prison he committed a murder. Heaven only knows how my sufferings were intensified through this terrible comradeship. How I shrank from the touch of his hand. What loathing took possession of me when I felt his breath on my face at night.

I tried to overcome this aversion; but in vain. He knew it as well as I, and took every opportunity to revenge himself in such ways, as only a depraved mind can think of. However, it could have been of no avail to put myself in opposition to him, and any complaint to the overseer would only have provoked the wretch to worse tyranny.

At last there came a day when his hate seemed to diminish. He allowed me my night's rest, and seemed to be in a hurry. The next morning, shortly after we had begun work, he came close to me, and whispered in my ear:

"Do you want to escape?"

I felt the blood rush to my face, and could not say a word.

"Can you keep a secret?" he went on.

"Until death!"

"Well, then, listen: To-morrow Marshal d'Auvergne will inspect the docks, harbour, prison, and stone-quarry. Salutes will be fired from the walls and ships, which will make it difficult to hear the guard's signal for two escaping prisoners. Do you understand me?"

"Yes."

"What, then, will be easier than to knock off the fetters with the pick-axe, and escape when the overseer is not looking our way? Will you dare?"

"With my life!"

"Your hand."

I had never before touched his blood-stained hand, and could not refrain from shuddering as I clasped it. The next morning we had to undergo an inspection before going to work. An hour before noon the first salutes from the harbour reached our ears. The dull report went through me like an electric spark. Gasparo whispered to me:

'"When the first shot is fired from the barracks, strike with your pick-axe on the first ring of my chain close to the ankle."

A sudden suspicion came over me. "And if I should do it, how can I be sure that you will then free me? No, Gasparo; you must strike the first blow."

"As you say," he answered smilingly.

At that moment a flash came from the barracks, and then a report that reverberated a hundred times from the rocks. As the echo rolled over our heads I saw him get ready to strike, and felt my chain fall. Hardly had the thunder of the first shot died away before the second came. Now I was to free Gasparo. I was less dexterous than he, so it took several strokes to free the chain. At the third shot we threw away our caps, climbed up the rock, and struck for a path that led into the valley. Suddenly, at a sharp bend in the road, we stood before a little guard-house, in front of which were two soldiers. They pointed their guns at us, and ordered us to surrender. Gasparo turned towards me, struck me heavily, and said:

"There, stay, and let them capture you. You always were a thorn in my path."

As I fell I saw Gasparo throw down one soldier and rush towards the other. Then a shot, and all was dark and still around me.

When I opened my eyes, I found myself lying on the floor of a little unfurnished room, but faintly lighted by a small window. I arose with pain, and, leaning against the wall, tried to think. The recollection of my last adventure soon came to me. Probably I was in one of the upper rooms of the guard-house. I crept to the door and found it locked. The little window was about four feet above my head. I succeeded in reaching it and looking out.

The rock rose about forty feet from the house, and a brook ran between me and the cliff.

To stay here would be ruin, whereas in daring farther lay a possibility of escape. I forced myself through the small window, dropped down, and crept towards the brook. The water in the stream came to my waist; but as both banks were high, I could walk along in it without my head showing.

I soon heard distant voices, and raising my head carefully over the bank of the stream, I saw silent figures moving towards me.

Suddenly a dark lantern was turned on the bank close by my hiding-place. I dived under the water and held my breath until it seemed that the veins in my head would burst. When I could bear it no longer I rose again, took breath, looked around me, and listened. All was still. My pursuers had gone. I then climbed the bank on to the stony path. Wind and rain in my face, I strode rapidly on with no other leader than the storm.

About five o'clock in the morning, as day began to dawn, I heard bells ringing, and saw a large city in front of me. Not daring to go any farther, I sought shelter in some thick shrubbery near the road. When night came on I continued my journey; but hunger soon drove me into a small village on the road. I crept softly between the cottages and knocked on the minister's door. He opened it himself, and I told him my story. He gave me something to eat and drink, an old coat in exchange for mine, and a few francs.

On the fifth day after my flight from Toulon I reached Italian ground. I begged my way from place to place until I arrived in Rome, where I hoped to find occupation, if not friends. I hired a small room, rested a few days, and then eagerly sought work. Evening after evening I returned disappointed. The little money which I had begged melted away. At last I could not pay my landlord, and he turned me out into the streets. Mechanically I followed the stream of passers-by, which led me to St. Peter's. I crept in wearily, and sank down in the shadow of the large doors. Two men stood near me reading a poster that was hanging on one of the columns.

"Merciful heavens," said one, "how can a man risk his life for a few lire?"

"And with the certain knowledge that out of eighty men, eight or ten fall and break their necks?" said his companion.

"Horrible work."

They passed on and were lost in the crowd.

I sprang up eagerly and read the notice. It was headed, "Illumination of St. Peter's," and made known that eighty men were wanted to light the lamps on the dome, and three hundred to light those on the columns. I went to the manager, had my name put on the list, received half my money down, and was to present myself there at eleven o'clock the next morning. I was there promptly, amid a crowd of miserable-looking men. The doors of the office were soon opened, and we crowded into the hall. My eyes seemed to be drawn to one corner of the room. My heart stood still—it was no mistake—I had recognised Gasparo. I went over towards him, and, touching him, said:

"Gasparo, don't you know me?"

He raised himself up lazily, and said: "Ah, François! I thought you were in Toulon."

"I can't thank you that I'm not there. Listen to me. If we both outlive this night you shall give me satisfaction for your perfidy."

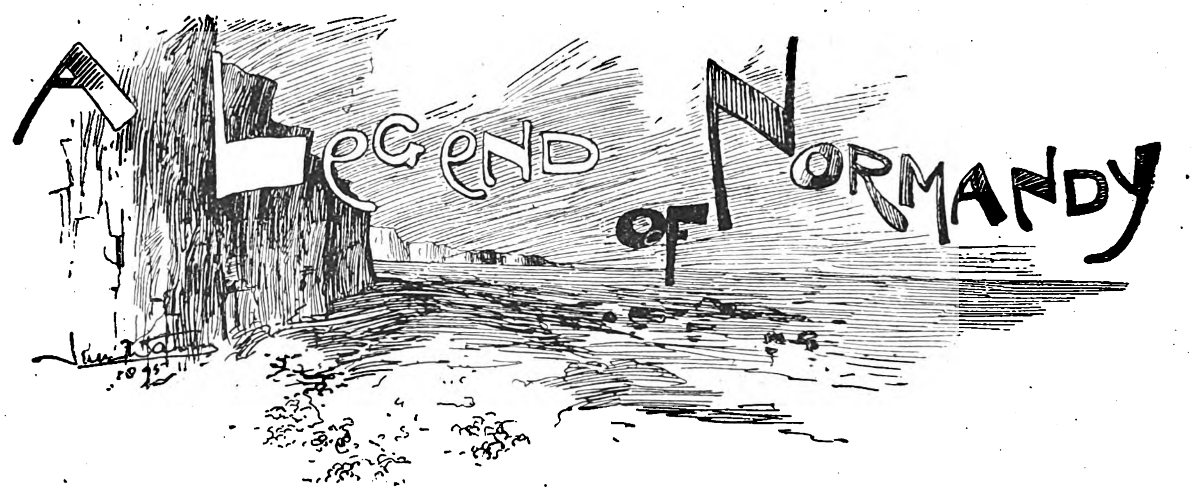
He looked indifferently at me, and lay down to sleep. At seven o'clock we were all called up, and climbed the stairs that led to the dome. My place was about half-way up, and I saw Gasparo go up still higher. When we were all ready, we crept through the windows up to small boards hanging by ropes. Each one was given a lighted torch, with which he was to light the lamps that he passed as the ropes were let down. After I had lit all my lamps, I looked round at the scene. Suddenly I felt my rope shake, and looking up, saw a man putting his torch to it. It was Gasparo! With the agility of a cat I climbed up the rope, put my torch in the villain's face, and caught hold of the rope above the place where it was on fire.

Gasparo, blinded and wild with pain, gave a terrible yell and rolled down like a stone. Through all the humming of the living ocean beneath I heard the dull thud as my enemy struck the pavement. I had hardly recovered my breath when we were drawn up into safety again.

I told the director what I had gone through. The truth of my story was proved by the half-burned rope, and I was given money enough to leave Rome.

Since then I have had many adventures, but never found myself in such terrible company as on the dome of St. Peter's on that fatal Easter.

H. Morse.



A LEGEND OF NORMANDY

It is June. A clear, fresh, early summer morning. Along the coast of Northern France the sun glitters over the golden sands; a fresh breeze tickles the laughing foliage of the trees and flicks the rank grass on the low salt marshes into some semblance of life. The last vestige of the soft gossamer mist has lifted and floated away into the nothingness of the deep blue atmosphere. The silver veil has been torn asunder and reveals the great conical rock of Mont St. Michel with the narrow outline of the Abbey pinioned 500 feet above the *grèves*.

At this point of vantage two men are standing in the deep embrasure of the window of the Salle des Gardes. They are both young, and appear to be strangers to each other, for although they came through the low menacing entrance together and mounted the broad stone steps side by side, neither of them spoke. A single glance is enough to satisfy the observer that they belong to different nationalities. The taller, and perhaps the younger of the two, is English. His companion is unmistakably French.

The stone-flagged chamber in which they find themselves seems deliciously cool after the heat of the steep ascent from below. Here formerly the vassals of the monastery assembled on solemn occasions. To-day it is sombre enough to strike a chill into the boldest heart. On the foot of the grand staircase behind, the *concierge* is sitting, beating a monotonous tattoo with his keys. He is waiting until the party is increased before he commences once more the weary *rôle* of showman.

From the window a bird's-eye view is obtained of picturesque tiled houses, tangled gardens, and broken walls overgrown with vines and coloured here and there with brilliant patches of deep pink wall flowers, climbing over one another down the rock.

The Englishman, who had been standing on the stone seat and looking out with the keen relish of an artist, now gives a little whistle of mingled surprise and delight. Two figures are mounting the winding stairway from ramparts which are green and bronze with moss and lichen. To improve matters they are both ladies, and one of them young and, even at that distance, pretty. He feels his spirits rising. They are English undoubtedly, and it is nearly a month since he has heard his own tongue spoken. He waits with some impatience till they enter and pass on to the porter's lodge to inquire for a guide. Undoubtedly the girl *is* pretty. She is wearing a straw hat, a neat fawn-coloured suit, and a white shirt with a stiff collar and well-tied bow—facts which the Englishman takes in with considerable satisfaction, for his first impression that she is a fellow-countryman seems confirmed.

The new-comers cannot rouse the *concierge* from his apathy. They come over and stand by the window. Neither of them look in the Englishman's direction; they do not seem aware of his presence.

At this he feels slightly offended. His insular prejudices return. He has no right to force his attentions on these ladies, and no intention of doing so if they are likely to prove unacceptable. He looks at the elderly lady, and decides two things. First, she is the pretty girl's mother; secondly, it is her place to open a conversation. He glances at the slim figure in the fawn-coloured suit. She is gazing down through the window which he has vacated, and apparently has no curiosity to know anything about him whatever. The brown hair, with the faintest colouring of auburn, is ravishingly beautiful as a sheet of light falls through the opening upon it. Only a glimpse of her neck and the bare suggestion of a soft, rounded cheek is visible from where he stands, but if he had not already seen her face instinct would have told him that it was the back of a pretty woman.

He shrugs his shoulders and turns away from the picture. Even to hear the musical voice, which he knows must lurk behind those full rose lips, he is not going to run the risk of a snubbing.

He begins striding up and down impatiently. The *concierge* has apparently fallen asleep. Presently he passes through one of the gateways which lead from the Salle des Gardes and begins exploring a gloomy passage which takes one to what were once the stables of the Knights of Mont St. Michel. When he comes back he finds the Frenchman has entered into conversation with the two ladies.

At this he tugs at his moustache and frowns.

"Confounded impudence," he mutters, and begins pacing up and down again.

They are talking in French. After listening for a moment, without understanding a word, he comes to the conclusion that the girl and her mother are French. They are talking quickly, and gesticulating with the ease and piquant expression of a native. This does not improve the young man's temper. He feels disappointed and annoyed.

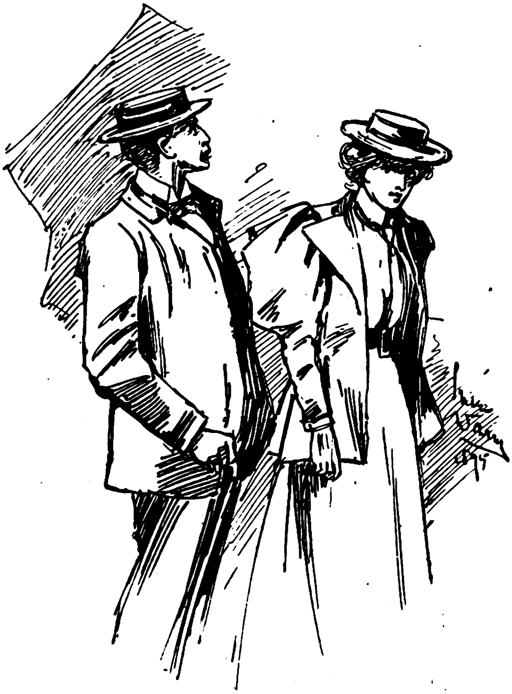
Presently the guide gets up with a start. He looks out of the door, peeps through the window, and finding no one else in sight begins to lead the way up the grand staircase. The Englishman walks alone; the other three go together.

Occasionally he takes a surreptitious glance at the girl. Once, just as the top of the stairs is reached, their eyes meet. It is only for a second, but he feels his heart beating a little faster. There is a piquant charm in the quiet, self-possessed face; an unfathomable depth in the large grey eyes.

The girl turns away and addresses some remark to her companion in English. The man hears this and starts. Yet it was palpably done for effect; intended so very evidently for him to hear, that the Englishman takes no notice.

"She knows a few words of English and wants to display her learning," he thinks uncharitably, and goes on by himself.

Presently the whole party emerge on the parapet in front of the church itself. Quite a wind is blowing up here. The place is littered with scaffolding and boards belonging to the builders who are executing some repairs inside. To see the view properly it is necessary to climb over this lumber. The Englishman relents a little and holds out his hand to the girl although he does not say anything. She shakes her head and declines with a bright smile which makes him anxious again to get on more friendly terms. He secretly hopes that she will fall or sprain her ankle or have to seek his assistance after all; he says to himself that he hates independence in girls, but he cannot help admiring the nimble way in which she climbs about.



Sees the object of his thoughts standing at his elbow.

All around a glorious stretch of blue sea rapidly encroaching on the glistening sands is to be seen. Here and there fishermen with their nets over their shoulders are hurrying back to terra firma looking like ants crawling over the *grèves*. The dark rock of Tombeline is already surrounded by water; immediately below them, the steep sides of the mount honeycombed with sombre crypts and secret dungeons, and a little to the right, the rugged sides are covered with tangled green stuff, shrubs and trees.

The others have entered the church, and the Englishman determines to say something—anything—only something to find out to what nationality his companion belongs. She has turned away and is examining the elaborate carving over the doorway.

"Evidently she finds that more interesting than me," thinks the Englishman, taking out his watch and deciding that sight-seeing is decidedly dull.

He approaches the girl, and at the same instant she enters the building and joins the others.

Thereupon the young man begins to call himself names. He takes no interest in the details of the architecture. One quick glance is all that he requires. It seems ages before the others exhaust the wonders of the nave with its aisles and clerestory. At last they all emerge into the famous cloisters. From the gloom of the dismantled church it was a relief to emerge into the brilliant sunshine of the open court, hundreds of feet above the miniature world below, surrounded on all four sides with a triple row of more than two hundred columns, sheltered with a little roof of red, yellow, and dark blue tiles. The whole effect is indescribably light and beautiful. The Englishman goes over to the outer wall and takes another glance at the savage precipice below and the fairy scene around. He becomes conscious that someone is looking over his shoulder.

"How lovely it is up here," he exclaims, but whether he is addressing himself or anyone who is listening it is impossible to say.

"That's a fact," says a pretty, silvery voice at his elbow, with just the suspicion of a drawl. "I would like to live right here for ever."

He turns quickly and sees the object of his thoughts standing at his elbow.

"Which means you are an American," he says, with a laugh.

"Why, certainly. I have been wondering what nationality you were."

The Englishman feels flattered. So she has condescended to give him a thought after all.

"I saw you leaning out of the window as we came up, and I told mamma I thought you looked like an Englishman," she goes on with engaging frankness; "I have been waiting to hear you talk."

The last words are uttered with a little *moue*, and she lays a slight emphasis on the word "waiting," which makes the Englishman feel somewhat guilty.

"I thought you were French," he explains hastily. He feels like biting his tongue out the moment he has spoken, for he is dimly conscious that this may not be taken as a compliment, and he has an idea that there is an angry gleam in those grey eyes which are surveying him with a calm scrutiny.

"Oh, spare me!"

"I mean from the way you speak," he goes on in some confusion, and then breaks off lamely.

The girl colours a little. French is not one of her strong points, and she has a dim idea that this good-looking Englishman is making fun of her. It seems likely for a moment that a coolness will spring up between them, for the American says something about keeping the others waiting and goes off down the arcade, leaving the Hon. Charlie Winter to follow.

He has half a mind to stay where he is, but he does not mean to be deprived of her society so soon, and strolls leisurely after her.

"You don't know what a pleasure it is to hear one's own language again," he says humbly, as he overtakes her at the corner. "One gets so tired of speaking in gestures, and understanding other people by signs and wonders. What a beautiful place this is."

"Yes; perfectly charming. I am just longing to go round in a boat."

The Honourable Charlie laughs.

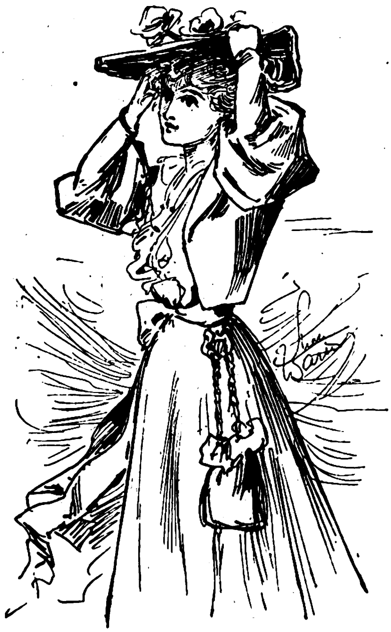
"Are you?" he responded. "Perhaps we might go together if we ever get down from here," and he shoots a quick glance at her sweet mobile features, as if half expecting to see that little pout appear again at his presumption.

However, she merely smiles, and laughs back at him. The Frenchman turns round at this moment and winks solemnly; there is an envious gleam in his eye, as if he would gladly have changed places, and "swapped" the mother for the daughter.

"No doubt he would," thinks the Honourable Charlie, pulling his moustache. The Englishman has taken a new interest in sight seeing. Dawdling, which irritated him before, now seems an occupation for the gods, and even exploring the terrible dungeons below the crypt has its special attractions.

By the time all the wonders of the Mount are exhausted, the sea has closed in on every side, and nothing but the low granite dyke, stretching like some great sea serpent to the shore, prevents the island from being entirely cut off from the mainland.

There is still an hour before lunch, and the Honourable Charlie offers to charter a boat from a fisherman, and secretly hopes that the old lady is a bad sailor, and will not come. In this, however, he is disappointed. To make matters worse, his offer to assist his divinity over the rocks is laughingly refused and he has the mortification of seeing her intrusting herself to the boatman to be carried through the water to where the little craft is anchored. He thinks to himself that he would have given a five pound note to exchange places with that man.



Brushing back the rebellious waves of hair.

He manages, however, to get her to himself in the bow of the boat which a man and a boy propel with huge oars through the water. It is a wonderful sight this massive pile of rock crowned with its abbey fortress and as they round the corner and come in sight of the little town clinging to the precipitous slopes, the houses among the green vines and figs and encircled by the solid belt of ramparts and massive buttresses defying the invasion of the sea, both are lost in wonder. Across the glittering water the green coast of Normandy forms one side of a gigantic bay; and land and sea and rock are all bathed in a glorious flood of sunshine.

The Honourable Charlie looks up at his companion. She is smiling and her hands are clasped enthusiastically. He fancies her cheeks are a little flushed.

"This afternoon we might walk round on the sands if you like," he ventures.

"Unfortunately we are going away directly after *déjeuner*," is the disappointing answer, "otherwise I should have been delighted. They are dreadfully dangerous are they not?"

The Englishman nods. His face has fallen a little at her announcement, but clears again the next moment as he says:

"Where are you going to? St. Malo?"

"No, Coutances."

"I am sorry. I thought, at least I hoped, that we might see some more of each other."

The girl shot a quick glance over her shoulder. Her mother sitting in the stern with the Frenchman is out of sight. She leans a little towards her companion and whispers something which makes him utter a little exclamation of surprise.

"And you are travelling alone?" he says after a moment's silence.

"Yes; quite alone. I have no one else in the world," and her voice breaks a little.

"I am sorry—inexpressibly sorry," he says with a ring of genuine sympathy. There is another interval of silence and then he goes on: "To-morrow I am due at St. Malo, where I stay for a month. If—if at any time I could be of any use to you perhaps—perhaps you would send me a wire and I would come at once, you know."

She smiled back at him gratefully. The large grey eyes are filled with tears.

"You are too kind" she answers in a low voice which trembles a little in spite of her effort to control herself, "but I could not think of troubling you. Thank you a thousand times."

The Honourable Charlie does not say anything more at the time, but he resorts to a pretty artifice that his hand may rest on hers for an instant and he feels an exquisite thrill at the touch.

They are not staying at the same hotel but after lunch he puts on his hat and strolls round to the viaduct from which the diligence starts in the hopes of having another glimpse of the girl before she goes. The sea has already receded, leaving the bare expanse of yellow ochre streaked here and there with a serpentine silver line of water, and miles away on the horizon a faint blue line marks the boundary of the *grèves*.

He is early. The diligence is already loaded with luggage, but the horses are not in, and the passengers have not made an appearance. He waits about a little, allaying the demand for English "tabac" which comes from the small bareheaded boys sitting with their legs dangling over the edge of the dyke. The road is reached from the gateway of the town by a little platform which runs round the curve of the buttress, and leads by a crazy flight of steps on to the sand. The Honourable Charlie saunters along the bridge, and presently the figure he is looking for emerges through the entrance, and to his delight he finds that she is alone.

She is romping with one of the huge mastiffs belonging to the fishermen, when he comes up, and he stands and watches her with ill veiled admiration in his glance.

"Well?" she says, stopping and pushing back the rebellious waves of hair that have fallen over her ears, "I suppose we shall have to start soon."

"I suppose so," he says; "I wish you were able to stop."

They walk together for a little time in silence, making their way towards the diligence.

"I have been thinking over—over what you told me," the Honourable Charlie goes on after a short pause. "Don't you think it would be wise to see a doctor?"

"A doctor!" with a little laugh; "what good could he do? We went to several specialists in Paris. They all say the same."

"But at least you might have a companion. If anything were to happen——"

"Yes, yes," she answers quickly, "I would have done so long ago, but mother will not hear of the extravagance. However, when we reach Coutances I shall suggest the matter again."

The Englishman glances at her with renewed respect.

"Well, you are a plucky little woman," he says frankly.

At this she blushes.

"Most people are courageous enough to face a necessity," she replies, with a smile.

He helps her to her seat on the roof of the diligence, assists her mother, who appears at this moment, to a corner place inside, and then climbs up beside his new divinity to have a last word with her.

Not until the horses are actually starting does he get down, and his last words are:

"Good-bye. And remember, if I can ever be of any use send me a wire; here is my address."

He jumps down, leaving his card in her hand, and stands in the middle of the road watching the rickety conveyance out of sight. Once or twice she turns and waves to him, and then he goes back to his hotel haunted with the memory of that sweet face and those large grey eyes, and secretly laughing at himself for being such a romantic fool.

About a fortnight later the Honourable Charlie Winter finds among his correspondence a letter in an unknown and unmistakably feminine hand. There is always a special interest in a communication from an unknown correspondent, but as he takes it up and examines the post-mark, an idea flashes across him, and he tears it open with a sudden accession of eagerness.

As he already anticipated, it is from the American, whose acquaintance he made at Mont St. Michel. It is brief, apologetic, almost tearful.

"The worst has happened," the letter runs simply, "and the doctor says that mother cannot possibly outlive the week. I thought I should be able to face my troubles alone, but now the time has come I am afraid. If you can come without any inconvenience to yourself you will earn the undying gratitude of yours sincerely, Harriet Tabor."

Of course, he goes. The idea of the poor girl being left alone in her sorrow maddens him, and he is selfish enough to be almost glad of the excuse to see her again.

About half-past six that evening he finds himself ensconced in a comfortable first-class carriage steaming into the little station of Coutances. From the window he can see the cathedral with its tall spires standing up against the gold and purple sky surrounded by its brood of white houses, with their slate roofs aflame with the reflection of the western glow.

He gets out, and takes a 'bus into the town. His one object is to get to his divinity as soon as possible. To his consternation he finds that he has still several miles to go. Something like a feeling of despair comes over him. A gendarme directs him to a little inn which, to judge from the number of vehicles standing in the courtyard, belongs to a fly proprietor.

The proprietor, in his blue blouse, is an idiot or only half awake. The Honourable Charlie feels that his temper is being sorely tried.

Finally a pretty, rosy-cheeked waiting girl appears, who speaks English with a rippling fluency.

"Oh, yes, they know the place. It is a resort for invalids, a spa some twelve miles away."

This is not comforting, for the Englishman is burning to reach his destination.

"Have they a horse that would do that distance?"

The proprietor takes his hands from his pockets and rubs his nose between his finger and thumb.

"To-night?" asks the rosy-cheeked girl.

"At once!" the Englishman replies impatiently.

A short consultation follows. Then the girl speaks again:

"To-morrow we will take you."

The Honourable Charlie offers a fabulous sum. The peasant rubs his nose again. Finally a horse is produced.

That drive seems as if it never would come to an end.

"I hope that I shall not be too late after all," he says to himself, taking out his cigarette case and drawing a long breath of the sweet country air and the odour of fresh cut hay. "Poor girl!"

The memory of her face haunts him. He thinks of her as he saw her first toiling up the steep steps of the abbey, her pretty cheeks flushed with exertion, her sailor's hat a little on one side and a bunch of red carnations in her belt.

"I must be in love with the girl," he thinks, "or I should not be so anxious about her. Love at first sight. Bah! What a fool I am."

* * * * *

When he reaches his destination he is shown at once to Miss Tabor's room.

"How good of you to come!" she says gratefully. Her voice trembles a little, and her eyes are red from weeping. One glance at her face and the Englishman knows what she cannot find courage to tell him—the mother is dead.

He does his utmost to comfort the girl. The loneliness of her position is horrible to contemplate.

"I must tell you," she says presently, as they sit together in the verandah, over which clematis, honeysuckle and vine intertwine and mingle with frail pink roses; "but it is sad—oh, so very sad!"

Her voice breaks a little, but she goes on:

"My mother committed suicide last night."

The Honourable Charlie's eyes are fixed on a fountain opposite. "Ah! Poor woman! In her state it was wrong that she should ever be allowed to travel alone."

He is inexpressibly shocked.

There is a moment's silence, and then quite unaccountably the girl laughs. It is a savage, exultant laugh, which makes the Englishman's blood run cold.

She catches his look, and her manner changes instantly.

"I beg your pardon," she says. "If you will forgive me I will go in and rest. I think I have gone through a little too much."

The Honourable Charlie remains on the verandah.

"Poor girl," he mutters. "Poor girl. I am sorry indeed for her."

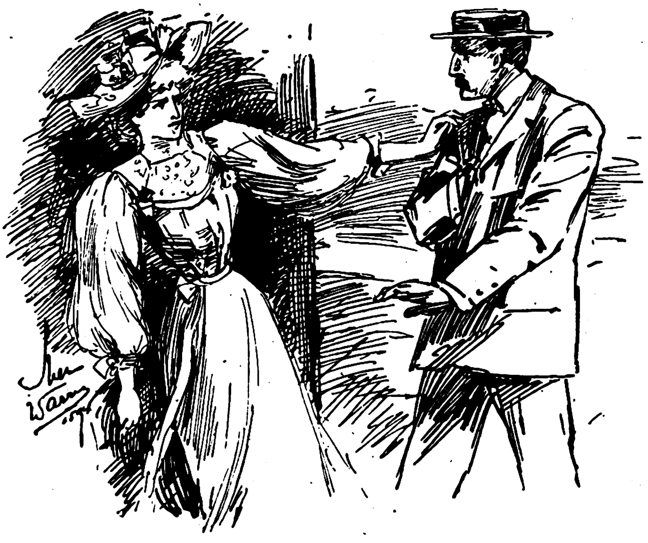
His position is rather embarrassing.

The least he can do is to remain here until all the funeral arrangements are complete; until the body of the unfortunate woman is interred.

After that his course is not so clear. The young lady herself will have to be consulted. Presumably she has a certain amount of money with her, and will return to America. Unless ——

The Honourable Charlie smiles thoughtfully. Then he throws back his head and laughs, for there does not seem any reason, after all, why he should not at least suggest the most reasonable way out of the difficulty.

True, he knows nothing of the girl except that she is remarkably pretty. Yet she is evidently clever and strong-minded, and endowed with pluck, the quality above all others that he admires in a woman. He gets up restlessly, and begins pacing up and down. The girl's face haunts him. Fate seems to have thrown them together.



She pushes him back with a force that surprises him.

"There is the hand of Providence in this," he says, coming to a sudden stand-still and pushing his hat back from his forehead. "Besides, marriage at the best of times is a lottery."

* * *

It is three weeks later. Outside one of the little hotels in Mont St. Michel a man and a woman are sitting.

"I am glad we chose this place for our honeymoon," the man is saying, as he raises his handsome eyes to the girl's face.

"Yes, indeed; it is here that the peasants always come for their wedding trip."

She leans back in her chair, fanning herself with her handkerchief.

"How hot it is!" she exclaims a moment later; "my throat feels parched!"

He fetches her a glass of ice water, and she drinks it down feverishly. She certainly does not look well.

Watching her narrowly he is startled by the look in her face. While his eyes are resting on her she rises to her feet.

"It is breathless here," she exclaims; "let us go on the ramparts. Come! Come quickly!"

She starts off without waiting for him, and frightened at her manner he hurries after her up the narrow steps which lead to the walls.

"Darling, you are ill!"

She answers him with a laugh; the same savage exultant laugh that had made his blood run cold before.

Then she leans back against the wall, panting. He goes up to her but she pushes him back with a force that surprises him.

"Listen, listen," she cries, "I have made a fool of you. Ha! ha! You thought it was my mother who was mad. You believed what I told you. But it was not. It was me! me! me! You fool! Twice I have been in an asylum. Ha! ha! ha! They let me out. They thought I was cured. My mother took me away. Travel, the doctors said, would do me good. We came over here, and she never guessed that she was travelling with a maniac. Ha! ha! It was grand. Do you see? It was grand. She did not know. Only at times it came over me. I felt it coming like I feel it now. I used to go away by myself and fight it out with the fiends that possessed me. But how can I here? I am shut in by the sea and the quicksands. They shan't get me. No! no! I am caught. When it was over I used to go back. No one should ever know. How frightened they would be if they thought I was mad. Ha! ha! You are frightened now. Why is everyone frightened of a poor, mad girl? My mother began to suspect. She sent for a doctor. They were going to take me back to the cells. I thought of a plan. I sent for you. My mother began to watch me. She was tired of me; she hated me; she wanted to shut me up. And then, oh, that terrible night! Every moment I feared the doctor would arrive. My mother was watching me like a cat watches a mouse. But I was stronger than she. Ha! ha! They should not lock me up. I would be free, free, free! It was better that she should be killed. Do you see how cunning I was?"

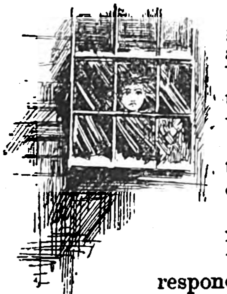
The poor girl stops as if for want of breath. The Englishman stands transfixed with horror. She comes towards him, and he shrinks back terrified. He tries to call out, but his lips are parched, and no sound comes. Her eyes are bloodshot, her face livid. She creeps nearer. He begins to run. His legs are trembling; his head seems on fire. He feels her hot breath on his neck. Suddenly her footsteps cease. He turns round. She has sprung on to the parapet, and the next instant, with a wild maniacal laugh she hurls herself over on to the rocks below.

Alder Carr.

Kitty Colahan's Loss.

THE narrow alley was filled from curb to curb with snow. The steps of a small house showed their edges from under untrodden mounds of white. No one had gone either in or out since the storm's coming. The cold was frightfully intense.

Against one of the panes of the only window a little nose was tightly pressed. The round spot it made was glaringly white. Below it was a grey spray of condensed breath; above it a pair of wondering brown eyes stared fixedly across the way to another little house which had all its blinds down.



A baby voice said: "Mamma, tum, look! Titty Tolagin's pulled down all her blinds!"

A young woman, poorly, but neatly clad, bonneted and wrapped to face the whirling snow, responded: "Yes, Mamie. It is to tell people that poor Kitty has lost her baby."

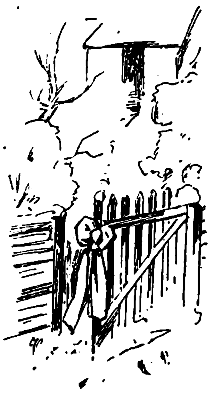
"Did she d'op it in the alley?"

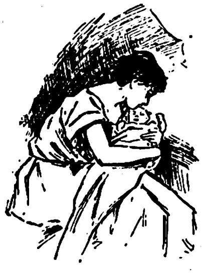
"No, dear. It has gone away for ever. Kitty's crying about it."

"Tant the baby come ever back to Titty?"

The mother smiled at the child's misunderstanding. "No, dear," she explained. "'For ever' means that the baby's gone for always. Kitty will never get it back. Be a good little girl while mamma goes to buy something for dinner. Don't go near the fire."

The mother kissed her and went out. The little one turned and stuck the white spot on the pane again. The breath-mist spread, and the brown eyes were fixed sorrowfully on the gap in the gateway.

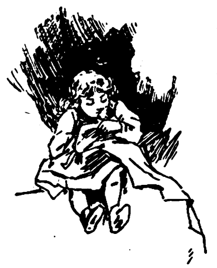




Soon a sudden impulse seized her. She slid down backwards from the chair holding her up to the outlook. There was a glimpse of chubby red legs above her short stockings as her feet touched the floor. She ran to the corner behind the door, her play world, and from beneath a fragment of old shawl doing duty as bed and cover, she tenderly raised a rag doll, cuddled it in her arms, kissed its flat face, and, with a great sob, whispered: "Dood-bye!"

She wrapped the shawl warmly about it and went to the door. Its latch was almost beyond her reach. From toe-tip to finger point she stretched her utmost; the latch loosened, the door blew open, and she sank down on her heels with a sigh of relief. Then she stepped out into the street.

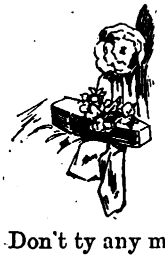
The snow-flakes rushed at her, but she set her determined face against them. The wind straightened back her curls and plastered her unbelted frock to the soft lines of her figure; but she threw herself against it with a brave thrust, then edged down the steps to the pavement. The snow reached to her knees. Nevertheless, with her eyes fixed upon the gate, she waded forward.



The curb was lined with snow. She stepped over it, and fell sprawling. For an instant she was lost in feathery depths, then a powdered head popped up, spitting and spluttering, but pressed tightly to it was the dirty face of a rag baby. "Never 'ou mind," she said to it firmly, "we'll det there. Keep oor mouth shut, den de snow tant det in. Oo tant spit like I tan."

Onward she plunged, clasping her precious all, floundering, flushed, breathing hard, her face set with purpose and resolve. At last she reached the open gateway, passed through it, and hit the closed door of Kitty Colahan's house a vigorous thump with her tiny fist.

The door opened. A grief-worn, overworked woman, shabby even in the best she had, was startled from her set look of weariness at seeing but half a mite of a child sticking out of the snow at her doorstep.



"Good gracious, what is this!" she exclaimed, in alarm.

The little one was quick to speak. Looking up, her brown eyes full of sympathy, holding the muffled baby aloft as far as her chubby arms would reach, she said:

"I've b'inged you *my* baby, Titty. Don't ty any more, p'ease."

MARY BRYAN.

A RUINED LIFE.

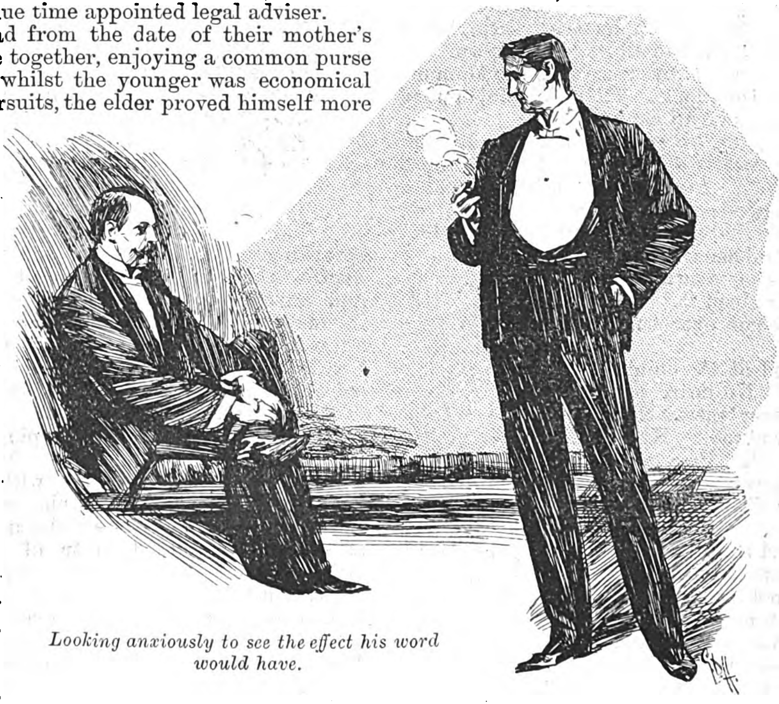
STARTING in life with equal chances, having each a modest competence, it might not unreasonably have been expected that Claude and Gerald Willis would, as their father had done before them, in course of time become prominent citizens in the thriving town of Oxminster in which their predecessors had for generations been respected and looked up to.

They were admittedly well-behaved, quiet-spoken young fellows, and when, at their mother's death, it became necessary for them to go out into the world, a vacancy was at once found for the elder, Claude, in an old-fashioned solicitor's office, whilst the younger was offered and accepted a berth under the corporation.

Both acquitted themselves well from the first, the elder in course of time being taken into partnership by his employer, and the younger, by dint of perseverance, working his way up whilst quite a young man to a responsible position under the Town Council, to which his brother was in due time appointed legal adviser.

The two lads had from the date of their mother's death shared a home together, enjoying a common purse between them, and whilst the younger was economical in his tastes and pursuits, the elder proved himself more or less of a spendthrift, and having speedily run through his own share of their joint inheritance did not scruple to avail himself of his brother's liberality.

The latter was the soul of generosity, and so long as he had enough for his modest requirements was quite willing that Claude should appropriate the remainder, without even so much as expressing gratitude for the same. The elder boy had, during his parent's lifetime, always been the favourite, and it seemed to come quite natural to him to usurp the lion's share of everything. Although by no means so robust as Gerald, he was decidedly the better looking of the two, and had that happy knack of making himself agreeable to everyone he came in contact with, whereas Gerald was by nature shy and reserved.



Looking anxiously to see the effect his word would have.

To the mother who had idolised her first born, he was little short of perfection, and her dying injunction to the younger son had been to watch over and protect his elder brother, a duty which out of reverence and affection for her memory he had, to his credit, ever kept before him.

So long as it was merely a question of money between them nothing had ever arisen to mar their brotherly relationship; but the time came, as come it will in the lives of most young men, when a woman came into their lives.

A woman, young and lovely, the personification of all that was good, pure, and beautiful—at least, so she appeared to Gerald; a beautiful toy, a thing to be possessed of and proud to own relationship with, was the light in which she was viewed by Claude.

Thrown constantly in her society, both men unconsciously fell in love with her, each in his own way. The elder man probably never for a moment suspected that for the woman he had set his heart upon making his wife his staid and reserved brother had anything more than the ordinary feeling of friendship.

But the latter, shy and self-abasing, as had ever been his *rôle* in life, was well aware of the turn events were taking, and was often sorely tempted to learn his fate from her own lips. Nevertheless, the promise extracted from him by his mother on her death-bed: "Promise me, my boy, whatever may happen, you will never thwart your brother's interests in life, for, remember, he has not the advantages of a resolute will and the indomitable self-control that you have," restrained him.

So he allowed matters to drift on in a way that, as everybody could see, could have but one ending. And she? —deep down in her heart there was a feeling of true admiration and genuine respect for the self devotion of the younger man to the elder, a feeling that might have been happily kindled into love, had he but dared to woo her aright, but his abstention in due course brought about what everybody in Oxminster had long foreseen, and the only person who was surprised probably, when the announcement was made to him one evening, was Gerald himself.

"I have done it at last old fellow."

"Done what?" inquired his brother.

"Asked Lucy to be my wife, and she has consented. I thought she would," he went on, in an aggravatingly confident tone; "but it's a weight off my mind to have it settled. Won't you congratulate me, Gerald? Who knows, it may be your turn some day."

"I—I hope you may be happy, Claude; but you need not bother about me, I shall never marry,—I'm not a marrying man, I think."

His brother was too elated with his newly-found happiness to take much notice of what was said to him; but had he noticed the set, stern look on the younger man's face, he might not have answered so jocularly as he did.

"Well, it takes less to keep one than two, any way; and do you know, I am awfully hard up just now, could you manage to lend me a few hundreds? Just till I get straight again, you know."

"I have not very much capital left, I am sorry to say, but I can raise a little. How much do you want?"

"Well, could you manage two or three hundred pounds, do you think?" looking anxiously to see the effect his words would have.

"How long do you want it for?" was the quiet rejoinder.

"Oh," airily, "only for a few months. I have been speculating rather heavily lately, but it is bound to come all right."

"You can have £300 in two days, but I must tell you it will exhaust all I have in the world, and if that goes I cannot do any more for you. I can manage easily enough to live on my salary."

"I'm awfully obliged to you. By the way, Lucy's father asked me to dine there to-morrow night and to bring you, too. Will you come?"

"No, thanks. I am engaged then; but please convey my congratulations to Miss Grayson."

"Queer chap, my brother," said the elder man, to himself, as he went to his room; "but he's a good fellow, and that £300 will just put me on my feet."

In due course the marriage between the rising young lawyer, Claude Willis, and old Dr. Grayson's daughter was consummated in the old parish church, and, to the surprise of everybody, the best man was not the bridegroom's brother, but a friend of the latter's, a member of the London Stock Exchange, who had come down expressly for the occasion.

Time went on, not a word had been said by Claude as to the repayment of the £300, and Gerald had never once alluded to it.

The treasurership to the Town Council falling vacant, Gerald was approached with a view to its acceptance, but he was very comfortable in the position he held, he said, and on the principle of to those that have shall be given, the post was offered to, and willingly accepted by, his elder brother, who thus combined in himself the position of solicitor and treasurer to the borough.

The two men were, in consequence of their duties, much thrown together, and one day the elder remarked: "Oh, by the way, about that £300 you lent me."

"I am in no immediate want of it, Claude, unless it is quite convenient."

"Well, I'm glad of that, for the fact is I'm in a bit of a mess."

"I'm sorry to say, I can't assist you—just at present."

"Is that really so?"

"It is indeed; although I have been living, as you know, very quietly, my expenses have been heavy of late; and although I should never think of worrying you, I meant to have asked if you could repay me, say £50, this month."

"Impossible—I am sorry to say—and——"

"Is it really as bad as that, Claude?"

"It is indeed; and if I can't raise £500, temporarily you understand, merely for a week or two, a month at the outside, I 'm a ruined man. It is not that I care for myself, so much, it's Lucy—it would kill her I'm afraid."

* * * * * *

"You are quite sure of what you say?"

"Sure! Sure as I stand here, it *must* come all right; it is only a matter of time, my stockbroker has told me so."

"Very well, then."

"I don't know how to thank you enough. I know I am doing wrong, but for her sake," he muttered under his voice.

People had noticed that the usually affable, easy-going Mr. Willis, sen., had been inclined to be testy of late; now, however, he was quite himself again, and it was Mr. Gerald who seemed more reserved than ever.

* * * * * *

"Have you heard the news?" said one Oxminsterian to another.

"No; what is it?"

"Gerald Willis has bolted."

"No!"

"Fact, I assure you; and they do say his accounts are all wrong."

"By Jove! I'm sorry for Claude."

"Yes, and his wife too."

"I should never have thought it of Gerald."

"No more should I. But you can never tell; these quiet ones are often the worst."

"That's so. It will be rough on Claude."

"Yes. I saw him just now; he is nearly beside himself at the scandal."

"Poor chap!"

The report of the London auditor, who was summoned to go through the town accounts, was that there was a deficiency of exactly £500, and so skilfully had the fraud been committed that it was impossible, in his opinion, for the treasurer to have discovered it until the annual audit.

Oxminster gave vent to a sigh of relief. It was bad enough for one brother to have committed himself; it would have been too much to bear had a charge of culpable negligence been brought home to the other.

* * * * * *

Months went by; the incident had been practically forgotten, when the astounding intelligence had become noised about that the absconding servant of the council, Gerald Willis, had voluntarily surrendered himself to the authorities in London, and would be charged before the Oxminster magistrates on the following day.

The prisoner having made a full confession, it was only necessary to call formal evidence, and the case before the Bench only occupied a few minutes, the prisoner being committed for trial. Out of consideration to the family, the brother was not called upon to give evidence, but he was the recipient of hearty congratulations on having been honourably exonerated from all blame in connection with the deplorable transaction.

S. J. F. Newbery.

A Man with a Noble Heart.

He was drunk. There was no mistaking it. He was also ugly. There was no room for a doubt of that either. Physically, mentally, and morally, he was ugly. The hilarious patrons of the Gum Tree Saloon in the little Australian up-country township had for some hours been watching his increasing opulence of alcoholism and combativeness with that interest which always marked them when prospects of a fight became prominent.

The movements of the stranger upon the night of which I write were therefore viewed with something more than common interest. One by one the miners had dropped into the Gum Tree Saloon during the evening, until the tables were all well surrounded, and the bar was filled with watchful observers.

"Who's the new chum?" inquired Tom Cathcart, in careless way, as he dealt three cards to Gashwilder.

"Dunno," briefly responded the big digger, throwing his hand down in a disgusted way; "he's on'y just arriv', and it's my opinion as how, if he keeps on, he'll reach the end of his claim extremely quick."

"Hello," ejaculated Mr. Cathcart a moment later, "the ball has begun."

Everybody in the room had risen to his feet. The tall, red-shirted digger, a man of angular frame and sinister visage, had at last succeeded in drawing somebody into a controversy. The diggers of "Squatter" Gulch were about to be entertained.

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Cathcart, "it's a shame for him to pick a row with Glanders. The poor chap can scarcely hold his head up, let alone fighting. I've a mighty good notion to sail in myself."

"Hold on," cautioned Gashwilder, with his index finger laid knowingly along his nose. "Thomas Glanders is all right; he is slow but sure. Look there!"

The quarrel at the bar had been growing louder. The new comer, inflamed with the fiery liquor he had been drinking, had selected one of the least offensive men in the settlement as the special object of his displeasure. This person, a Mr. Thomas Glanders, was a quiet, respectably-dressed man, with a solid face and a dejected manner, who was looked upon in a friendly, often a pitying, light by his companions. There had been something sad in his life—that was known to the entire population of the Gulch. What it was no one precisely knew, and no one cared. But nearly everybody took an interest in him, and not a soul lived on the diggings who would not have fought for his sake at any time.

The stranger was heaping abuse on Glanders' head—abuse which he could not comprehend, and which seemed to half bewilder him. But the offensive digger went on, goaded to increased fury by his own words. Still Glanders stood helplessly gazing about him, making no reply, but occasionally passing the back of his rough, brown hand across his forehead. Finally, in a transport of rage, the stranger drew a revolver. Then Glanders seemed to awaken. He spoke for the first time.

"Put it up," he said quietly, "or I will kill you."

The stranger laughed, and the crowd, angry and menacing, began to close in upon him. Glanders motioned them back.

"Put it up," he repeated firmly, "or I will shoot you like a coon."

The stranger fired, and a part of Glanders' hat fell to the floor. Few of the citizens of the Gulch had known or would have believed he could act with such decision. He had hitherto been thought by them to be a slow and easy-going person, too inoffensive to be trodden upon, and too gentle to respond with violence. But upon this occasion he belied his reputation. Quick as lightning—so quickly that only one or two in the room saw the movement—a Colt sprang from his pocket, a deep report sounded through the room, and the stranger fell to the floor.

There was silence for a moment. Then the wounded bully, after writhing a moment where he lay, beckoned Glanders towards him. He was no longer violent. He motioned Glanders to lean closer. There was nothing but pain in his red face now, and great beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead. He whispered a few words brokenly, and then suddenly fell back, dead. Glanders lowered the man's head to the floor, and then slowly rose to his feet. The hush, which had some time ago fallen upon the crowd, was not yet disturbed.

"Boys," said Glanders, in a voice which trembled slightly, "I hated to do it, but it couldn't be helped. I'm sorry it was so, and I'm willin' to abide by what you say. If it was murder, hand me over to the p'lice, and be quick about it."

A murmur that arose almost to a shout ran through the room. Every man there endorsed his course. Glanders began to move slowly towards the door. He paused once, drew his hat down over his eyes, buttoned his coat tightly about his throat, and thrust his hands into his pockets with an air that indicated a purpose.

"Poor things!" he muttered, as he strode into the night. "They're orphans now, and I made 'em so!"

* * * * *

On a piece of ground some paces from the beaten track, close to the trunk of a tall gum tree, some distance from the settlement of Squatters' Gulch, was pitched a rude hut. Near by, dimly seen through the darkness, were three lean, unhappy-looking horses, browsing in a helpless way upon the scant herbage which the place afforded. At the foot of the tree a heap of smouldering embers showed that there had been a small fire earlier in the night.

This was the scene into which Glanders peered half an hour after the tragic occurrence I have just described.

He went slowly over and threw a few sticks on the fire. In a little while there was a blaze, which, after spluttering a moment, gave out considerable light. This illumination, or the sound of Glanders' footsteps about the place, apparently aroused some degree of life inside the tent, for the flap was raised, and two very big blue eyes peered cautiously through the aperture thus formed. It was entirely without his knowledge that the owner of those curious eyes stole out of the tent and crept slyly towards him. Not until she spoke was he aware of her presence.

"Where's the old man?" were the first words Glanders heard.

They startled him slightly and he looked earnestly into the young face that was upturned to his. Perhaps it was the flickering of the firelight that caused the quick shade that fell across his face. But it looked like an expression of pain. The girl, annoyed at his silence, went on impetuously:

"Don't you hear? What's the matter with you? Where's the old man?"

"Down the Gulch," replied Glanders, slowly and with some difficulty.

"Oh," said the girl, with an odd mixture of sarcasm and curiosity. "He sent you to say he was drunk, I s'pose. Said he wouldn't be home till he got sober, didn't he? Told you to tell us to look sharp, or he'd lick both of us when he got home—hey?"

"Does he beat you, then?" asked Glanders, with a weak attempt at evasion.

"Does he? I should think he does. And I've got my opinion of a big loafer that licks a little gal like me, what can't help herself."

She was a slender child, perhaps twelve years old. Her hair was curly and light, and it fell in a tangled mass over her forehead and neck. She was poorly clad, and her brown feet had long been strangers to the cramping influence of shoes. There was a touch of great pity in Mr. Glanders' eyes as he looked at this child, standing there in the firelight, and regarding him fixedly.

"Tell me," he said, "do you like the old man? Are you fond of him?"

"Well," responded the girl after a pause, "I can't say as I love him. He's too handy with the back of his fist to make me cling to him."

Glanders sighed, as though he felt relieved from some anxiety.

"But then," the girl went on, with childish frankness, "you can't hate a man when he's the only purtector you've got. Ugly as he was, he put all the bread into my mouth as ever went there, and I've got to remember that. Sometimes there wasn't much of it, and sometimes it was mighty queer bread. But as a gen'ral thing, he did the best he knowed how."

Glanders was just at that moment thinking he was about the darkest criminal in the world. To save himself from possible destruction, he had killed a fellow-being—an act, I regret to say, which was not sufficiently infrequent in those days to call for any special regrets upon its own account. But Glanders reflected that in depriving the bully of his life, he had also taken away the only prop upon which this helpless child leant for support. It was a reflection which filled him at first with dismay and self-reproach, and then with a certain definiteness of purpose.

"Little girl," said he, after a moment, passing his hand over her straying curls with a kind of rough tenderness that was not without its element of magnetism. "Little girl, if there was a man—mind ye, I don't say thare *is* a man—but if there *was* one as come to you and says, says this man, if so be as you two children wants a home, bein' without one, ye can come and live along of me, and though it ain't a refined abode, bein' built as it were in the first rude stages o' civilisation—if any man was to say this to ye, and your dad didn't particularly mind, what would you answer?"

The girl looked full into his face.

"Answer? Why I'd take the offer like lightning—only," she hesitated an instant—"only the old man never'd stand by and let me have such a good thing as that—never."

"He'll never bother ye any more, my child," said Glanders. "Do ye feel very bad about it?"

"Bad?" she echoed.

"Yes. The old man has been took, as it were, to put it gently, to Abraham's bosom. He was killed, my child, and the man what offers to take ye into his home is the one as did it."

The young girl started back, and regarded Glanders with a strange expression. It was not a look of repulsion, or anger, or fright, but rather a look of astonishment. Presently, after peering into his eyes for some little time, she said:

"Then I don't believe it was your fault. You ain't the kind of a man to do that sort of thing 'thout a cause. And as for me, it's a-stonishin' he hasn't ketched it afore."

Glanders took a deep breath, which sounded like a sigh of relief.

"Then," said he, "we must be movin'."

In the morning the camp of Squatters' Gulch was surprised to see three horses standing by the door of Glanders' shanty, and, later in the day, it was still further astonished to observe two children, a boy and a girl, playing about the place. Who they were, and where they came from, was a deep and absorbing mystery. That their advent was connected with the death of the stranger was not a theory which occurred to many of the diggers.

Meanwhile, in the shanty itself, there were some odd developments. The new residents had quietly domesticated themselves with that affluent confidence which is the distinguishing trait of that migratory childhood, which, being cast this way and that by the changes which constantly occur in new countries, readily accustoms itself to fresh surroundings. One night Glanders said to the girl:

"I don't want to pry into no family secrets of yourn, becos it ain't none of my business perticklerly, but, at the same time, it ain't reasonable fer me to go on always a-callin' of ye, 'Little girl,' and the young chap, 'Bob.'"

"That's so," promptly replied the young girl. "My name's Lucy Bryton. And his," pointing to the boy, "his is Robert. His t'other name ain't like mine, 'cause he's only a 'dopted brother. *His* name is Rathbun—Robert Rathbun. Hello! What's up, Mr. Tom?"

"Nothin'," replied Glanders, whose face had suddenly become rigid. "On'y I dropped my pipe, that's all. Go to bed, youngsters. I want to think. Wait a bit. What became of yer mother—Bob?"

"Dead, sir. Drownded in the overflow. I haven't seen her since I was a baby."

When they were gone, and for hours afterwards, Glanders sat looking gloomily into the fire.

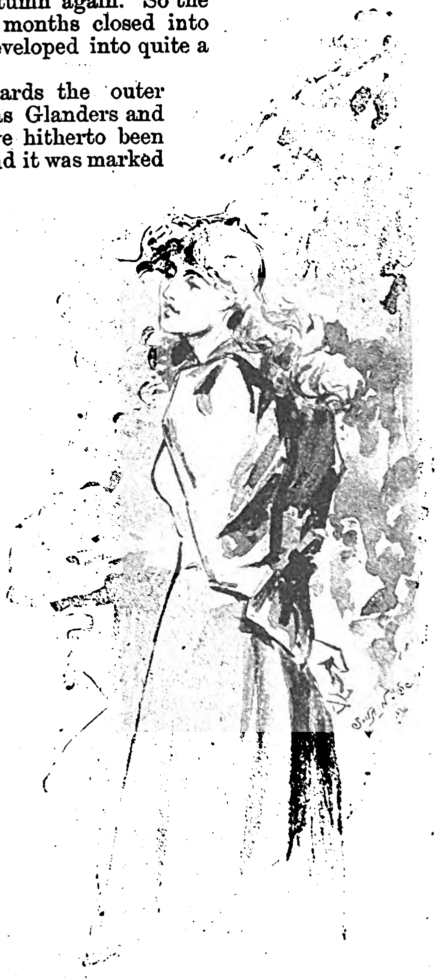
"Pore gal," he muttered, after a long time. "If matters had come out a *leetle* different that would hev bin my boy. Mine. Well, what's to hinder now?"

Having by some acute mental process convinced himself that nothing was to hinder, Glanders went thoughtfully to bed.

* * * * *

The soft autumn days glided by, the clear and genial Queensland summer melted slowly away into the crisp and vestal winter; then came the budding spring, the lazy summer, and the blushing autumn again. So the weeks glided into months, and the months closed into years, until Squatters' Gulch had developed into quite a township.

In a tasteful cottage, far towards the outer edge of the town, lived Mr. Thomas Glanders and the members of his family, who have hitherto been described. It was a pretty place, and it was marked here and there by the unmistakable traces of a woman's presence. Neat white curtains hung in the windows, a hammock swung on the verandah, and a trailing vine grew up over the posts by the door.



A lithe and graceful girl.

One night, as the sun was climbing down across the western sky, the verandah was occupied by two young people. A strong, hearty young man was swinging in the hammock, while standing beside him, idly moving the network backwards and forwards, was a lithe and graceful girl. She was blushing deeply, but not hanging her head. There was, indeed, in her large blue eyes a look of open frankness which I do not think is often found about the faces of young women when they are discussing the subject which was at that moment occupying her attention.

"There is something which seems almost like sacrilege about it, Robert," she said, with a touch of remonstrance in her voice. "I had grown to think you my brother in reality, as well as by association."

"But you love me, Lucy. You have told me so." His voice was deep, and not unmusical to the ear. And it had about it, in the time of pleading, a persuasive tenderness which, I fear, more than one of the fluttering damsels of the Gulch had found it difficult to resist. But Lucy was not of the common sort, and she did not heedlessly assent to the proposition advanced.

"What," she asked presently, "would *he* think?"

It was apparent that the young man did not require a more definite descriptive term to understand who was referred to.

"He would scarcely object, Lucy. You know he loves both of us dearly, and his greatest happiness would be in making us happy."

"True," replied Lucy thoughtfully. "But if—if he would rather we did not seek this kind of happiness, Robert—you know we owe him a very great deal. Our home, our playthings, our pets, our rescue from an existence that would have left us both more to be pitied than if we were dead, our education—all were given us by him. We can scarcely do anything that may bring him pain, Robert."

The young man in the hammock was silent for a moment.

"Tell me," he said, in a little while, "why you suppose there is any chance that he will object?"

Lucy's face assumed a deeper scarlet. "I—I—well, nothing. It is probably my imagination."

"Will you ask him?"

Another pause. Then, in a low voice: "Yes, I will ask him tonight, if he does not speak first. If he consents, Robert, I will do all that you have asked."

"That's a dear, sweet, girl," exclaimed Robert, springing to his feet and kissing her lips. "We shall be very happy."

As he strolled down the hill, Lucy's eyes followed his retreating figure sadly. When he was gone she drew a long and slightly tremulous breath, and laid her head against the post. She still sat thus, with her eyes bent upon the ground, when a heavy footfall aroused her attention.

"Good evenin', Lucy," Glanders said kindly, as he drew a chair up to her side, and seated himself so that the folds of her dress brushed against his knees. "I met Robert as I came up the hill. A fine boy that, Lucy. I'm as proud of him as if I had been his father."

A moment of silence, during which Miss Lucy breathed a trifle quickly. One hand lay unemployed in her lap. Glanders picked it up, and held it in his own. It looked so small, so white, so lovely in his great palm, that he speedily covered it up by drawing his brown fingers about it.

"It's a whiter hand," he began, slowly and reflectively, "though it ain't much bigger than it was when I first took it into mine, that night under the big tree. Lucy, you are more to me than I can tell you—more than I know. There is but one happiness for me, but one rest, after my life's struggle; and it has been a struggle, Lucy, that ain't always been easy for to get the best of. But, Lucy, I don't want to find fault nor to complain, if it has brought me you. Eh? Why, child, you are cryin'. Deary, if I've said anything that's grieved ye, don't mind me. Lucy, I'll never speak of it again as long as I live."

Mr. Glanders was down by her side, holding her hands and trying to soothe her. In a moment she became quite calm.

"You have been kind to me," she said, after a little while. "I was only a stranger's child—a stranger who would have taken your life. You took me in and cared for me, and worked and toiled for me, so that I might have comforts and be happy. You took me, a ragged, rough, ill-bred child, and you gave me the chance to become a lady. You have earned my—my love, and——"

"Don't speak that way, Lucy. I didn't want to *buy* your heart. I didn't Lucy, and I wouldn't take it like that."

"You didn't buy it, you—you won it! Tom, I love you very, very dearly. It may not be the kind of love you expect just yet, but by-and-bye, when we have grown used to each other, when we have forgotten that we were——"

"Father and daughter, almost!" he broke in. "Are you sure, Lucy? Will you never regret this?"

"Never!" she cried impulsively. "But let it be quick. Do not wait a day, but have it done at once! It—it must be without delay, or—or——"

She did not finish the sentence, but with a sharp, convulsive kiss upon his brown cheek—a kiss which sounded almost like a gasp—she was gone. In the gloaming, upon his porch, sat Mr. Thomas Glanders, a very happy man. Behind him lay all the gloom and sorrow and pain that could never come to him now. In the future—what? He could not answer, though it seemed very bright.

* * * * *

Robert did not come home during the night preceding the wedding—a habit which, I am obliged to confess, is not uncommon among the compatriots of his years. Mr. Glanders had wished to defer the quiet ceremony until his arrival, but Lucy had refused with a feverish haste, which her companion set down to the score of diffidence, It was some hours after the marriage that Mr. Glanders, failing to stir up any enthusiasm in Lucy's breast regarding the various topics of conversation, kissed her tenderly, and strolled out for a walk among the trees.

"She's better alone for a time," he muttered apologetically to himself. "When I come back in half an hour she'll be as bright and cheery as ever."

For some time after he went away Lucy sat looking blankly at the wall. Then she arose and walked out into the porch, and stood looking down the hill where she had last seen Robert pass away. In a few moments she became conscious that someone was near her. It was Robert, white as a ghost, and trembling nervously. She looked into his face, but could not speak. There was a deep pathetic inquiry in her eyes which spoke more plainly than words.

"Yes, I know," he said, in a strained and worried fashion. "I heard it as I came up. I shall not reproach you, Lucy, for if he asked you to marry him it was the only return you could make for all his more than fatherly kindness."

There was a footstep not far away, but it was not noted by the two young people.

"I have come, Lucy," continued Robert, in the same hurried and unnatural fashion, "to say good-bye."

"Robert!" she gasped, "do not, *do not* go away."

"I must," he said, in a strange tone, regaining a part of his own force as he saw a touch of weakness in the woman he loved. "There is no other course. It would break my heart to stay here and see you the wife of another. It would wear out my honour, my gratitude, my manhood. Day by day all that is good about me would fade and fade away, until I died of shame and mental agony, or became a reproach to all the world. It must be, Lucy. We love each other too dearly to have it otherwise."

Our pets.

She was silent.

"Good-bye, Lucy," he said, more quietly, taking her hand.

"Good-bye," she whispered, in a choking voice.

For a moment he held her hand in his. At the same instant a shadow that had been thrown by the sun across the ground almost at their feet, began slowly and stealthily to steal away.

"Try," said Robert, struggling hard to regain his composure, "try to forget me. You can only find happiness in that oblivion. Or, if you think of me sometimes, remember me only as the brother who grew up with you and loved you—with only a—a brother's love. Good-bye. God bless you, little sister."

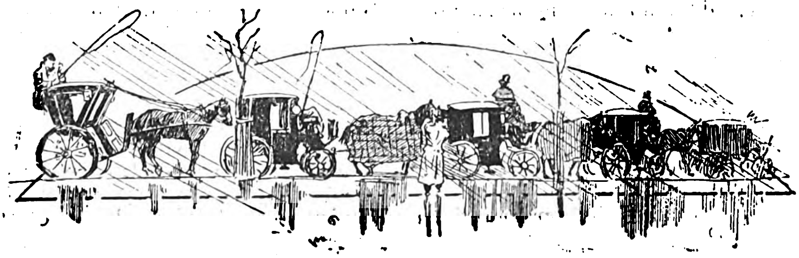
He turned on his heel and took a step forward. The sharp report of a revolver from the rear of the house arrested his attention.

"What was that?" asked Lucy, turning if possible a shade whiter.

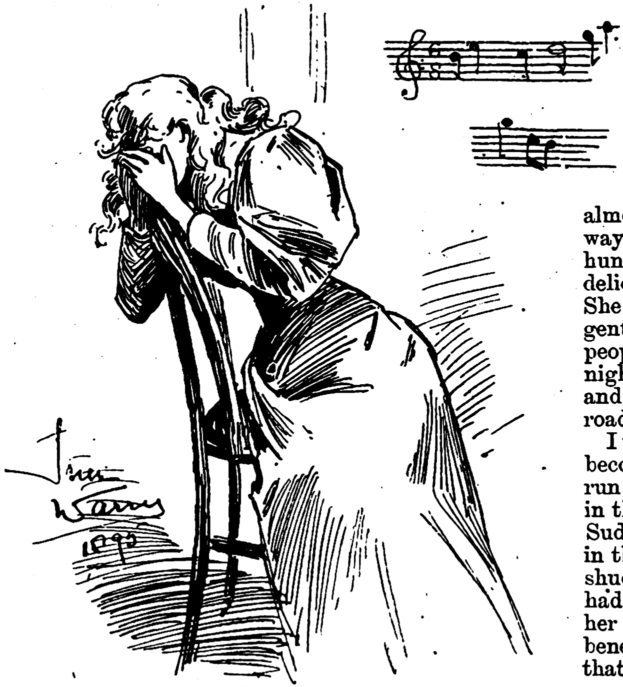
In a moment they were both under the great gum tree which stood a few paces up the side of the hill. What they saw at that moment will never be forgotten by either of them.

Stretched upon the soft carpet of grass, with a look of ineffable gentleness in his fast glazing eyes, a smile on his lips, and her portrait on his heart, lay the rigid figure of the husband of the stranger's child.

LEANDER RICHARDSON.



A BALLAD MADMAN



I am, the world knows, a kind, extremely sensitive, and honest man. The misfortunes of others, and all human sorrows, awaken my compassionate sympathy, and cause my tears to flow. No mendicant has ever passed me without receiving substantial aid.

I have bestowed marriage portions upon orphan girls, established deserving young men in business, founded hospitals, and provided for the aged.

I have taught self-denial to the rich, virtue to the fallen; and once, when attacked by ruffians with murderous intent, I persuaded them from their evil designs, and led them to repentance and reformation. Wherever I have encountered suffering it has been my purpose to mitigate and relieve it, carrying resignation to the dying, hope to the despairing, and changing into cries of joy the wild lamentations of the unfortunate.

Can I be, then, an unconscionable brute, controlled by blind instinct, a victim of inherent depravity, a madman attracted by blood as by the lips of woman, and one who flies to murder as to love? No; a thousand times no! Have I not already said that I am good and tender-hearted? I believe in God; in a God who rewards and in a God who punishes, in a God who sheds upon us the sweetness of His everlasting love, in a God who kindles the flames of expiating torment against those who trangress His laws.

Why—why, then, did I commit that terrible crime? Why did I slay, with the refinement of calm ferocity—yes, why did I kill a loving and beloved being? For I did, indeed, love her, sweet victim! Yet killed her; basely murdered her as she lay sleeping at my side; while in her happy dreams, perhaps, my image appeared to her, and she smiled tenderly upon it.

I loved Margot. She seemed a child, though almost eighteen years of age. I met her upon the highway, one evening, clothed in rags and almost dying of hunger and of want. She was pretty, slight, and delicate, very pale, with large eyes hollowed by suffering. She was an orphan, in whom no one took any interest; gentle and weak, she had been cruelly abused by wicked people, so she fled far from her tormentors, stopping at night in villages or at farms, asking for food, alms, and sometimes during the day picking up along the road the decaying fruit fallen from the trees.

I was deeply affected, and wept with her. What would become of her, thus alone in the world? Vice and crime run rampant in the country, lurk on the hill-side, crouch in the shadows of the trees, and death is everywhere. Suddenly a sinister flock of ravens wheeled ominously in the cold grey sky above our heads, causing me to shudder with fear, and I thought perhaps the good Lord had sent her there for me to love and protect. I took her with me. Being rich, I could afford the luxury of a benevolent action. The next day I married Margot. In that part of the country where I resided I was considered somewhat queer and eccentric, but this marriage was regarded as an act of pure lunacy, and thereafter my reputation as a maniac was definitely established. Upon seeing me pass, people frequently exclaimed: "That man is crazy." Alas! was it true?

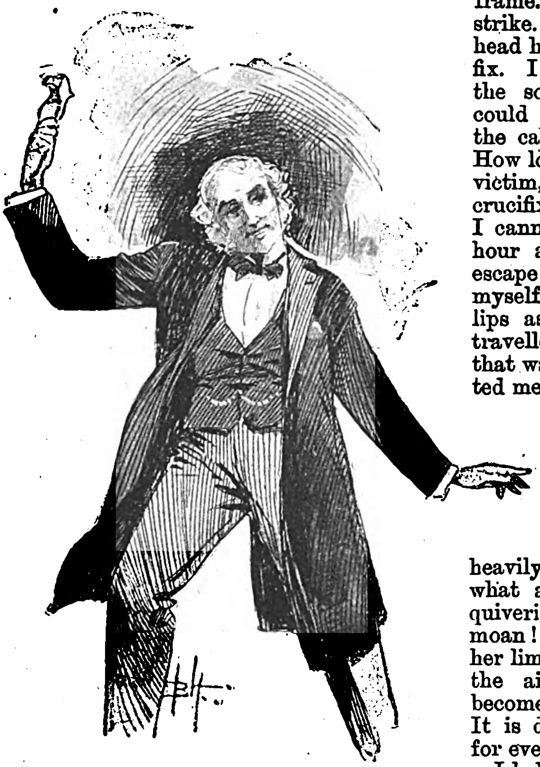
At all events, I was happy. Margot displayed so much tenderness for me—she was the most affectionate, the most devoted, the most submissive of wives. Fearing me as a master, she worshipped me as a god. I attempted to educate her in accordance with her new condition, for, as she had always lived with rustics, she had, of course, their manners. But, though her heart was good and her mind pure, night, black night reigned in her brain. She could not learn the simplest things, despite her prodigious efforts and her ardent desire to obey and please me.

Poor little creature, she understood only one thing, and that was to love me, and she endeavoured, by every means in her power, to give some proof of it by her blind submission and dog-like devotion. Then, too, she sang—sang eating, sang dressing, all day long. What she sang—ah! fatal and accursed song—was an old ballad, tender and pathetic, such as the blind chant in the streets. Her voice then took a mournful and monotonous intonation, swelling the words, dwelling on the syllables. That irritated me beyond everything. Margot's song was destroying my life. It haunted my reading, my reveries, my prayers. It was stamped upon my brain, and filled it with its stupid refrain. I could no longer read, no longer write, no longer think. I attempted to flee from its harassing presence. Whole days I traversed the fields, the forest, followed the river's course, humming to silence the abominable strains which pursued me. But neither field, nor forest, nor my voice itself could deliver me from the accursed air.

Poor little Margot! She knew nothing of all this torture. I had not told her, lest it should give her pain. And she continued to sing, thinking her voice still sweet to me. However, my patience was at last exhausted, and I requested her to be silent. She was astonished. She wept long and bitterly, and promised to sing no more. But the old habit was strong with her, the song had become such a part of her nature that frequently she would forget herself, and break out into singing.

At these times I would regard her sternly, and she would cease. Her voice was silent, but I perceived by the motion of her lips that she was continuing mentally, in spite of herself, as if impelled by some invisible power, the air begun aloud. At last she sang no more. But her lips were always moving. What had before troubled my ears, disturbed now my eyes. And this fearful thing happened: I no longer heard the song, but I saw it, saw it distinctly, plainly, remorselessly. As formerly, all objects sang with Margot's voice, now all things discovered its terrifying phantom.

Six years—ages—six years of this fiendish torment passed away. My health failed visibly, and I feared my reason was giving way. I no longer took pleasure in anything, all things were alike insupportable to me. My studies were abandoned. I became gloomy, and as restless as an imprisoned wild beast, and often had paroxysms of passionate anger or strange hallucinations. Death seemed imminent, and it was a great consolation to think that I should soon be delivered from the incubus which was destroying my life.



I sing it now, and dance to it all day.

One night Margot was sleeping peacefully by my side. How pretty she looked—her small face so delicate and sad, her rosy mouth half opened, her breath coming lightly and regularly, her bare arm folded under her head. I looked at her and gently caressed her long, unbound black hair streaming over the pillow. The night lamp shed a rosy light over her. But, hark! Suddenly, in the silence of the room, a sound arose. The song! The song! Yes, it was indeed the song again. I heard it, the accursed thing. It was escaping from the sleeping lips of Margot.

The blood rushed to my brain, a shudder shook my frame. I raised my arm as if to strike. In the alcove above my head hung a massive silver crucifix. I nervously seized it. But the song had ceased. Nothing could be heard in the room but the calm breathing of the sleeper. How long did I lean over the poor victim, panting, suffocating, the crucifix uplifted ready to strike? I cannot tell. The clock struck hour after hour. "It shall not escape me again," I whispered to myself. And I watched Margot's lips as a bandit watches for the traveller whom he expects to pass that way. Now her silence irritated me beyond everything.

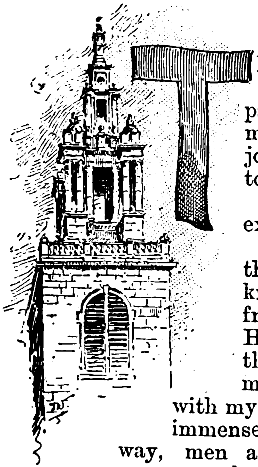
Ha! ha! at last. And scarcely has the first sound issued from those sleeping lips, than, brandishing the crucifix with both hands, and arms stretched at full length, I brought it down heavily upon Margot's head. With what a dull thud it struck the quivering flesh. Not a cry, not a moan! A few contractions twist her limbs. Her little hands beat the air, clutch the sheet. She becomes rigid, and moves no more. It is done. The song is silenced for ever.

I believed it then. Alas! Margot is dead, the gentle, the innocent Margot. But the song still lives, more pitiless, more tormenting than ever. It has passed from Margot's soul into mine. I sing it now, and dance to it all day; I cannot help singing it. If I travel, it follows me; if I plunge into debauch, it follows me; if I lose myself in the crowd, it follows me. Everywhere I go, there it is also; it is as much a part of me as my flesh and blood. Oh, pity me! Denounce me! Deliver me to justice! Send me to the scaffold! Death, kind death alone can save me from this spectre, this vengeance of God—Margot's song.

N. N.

LOVE
KILLETH
TIME

A DAUGHTER OF THE DESERT.



THE mess of the officers of the 2nd Chasseurs of Africa is particularly noisy. Their merriment runs high with shouts o joy and clanking glasses as they toast Lieutenant Henri Cursol.

"Now for the adventure!" exclaim the officers in chorus.

"With all my heart," replies the young lieutenant. "You know I left Mascara with orders from our chief to the *caïd* of the Havars about the incursions of the Tuaregs. I had accomplished my mission, and was returning with my platoon; crossing a part of the immense plain of sand. We kept on our way, men and animals, although nearly overcome by the intense heat, with our eyes partly closed, to avoid the reflection from the sand—a thousand times harder to endure than the heat of the sun. I was awakened from my torpor by an exclamation that came from behind me: '*El gueubeli!*'

"I turned round. The sergeant-major of my escort, an old African soldier, was pointing towards the horizon with excited gestures. The whole sky seemed to be covered by a thick cloud, resembling an immense column of smoke, touching the earth and reaching far into the heavens. '*El gueubeli*' was marching upon us with menacing strides.

"'Perhaps we can get ahead of it,' I said, ordering them to gallop.

"The serjeant-major shrugged his shoulders. '[illegible] so wills,' he said.

"We started off at a furious rate, but the tempest came on at a still greater speed; a violent wind was upon us, sending blinding whirlwinds of dust into our eyes at every step of the horses. Our discomfited guides lost their bearings, and stopped. Our horses as well refused to move further; they came to a standstill, and braced themselves against the gusts of wind.

"I was leaning on my horse, when I felt him trembling under me; then, suddenly, I received a frightful shock; it seemed to me that thousands of pounds of sand fell, all at once, on my head. Stunned, scarcely able to think, I managed to struggle with my horse as he shook his bridle with rage, then raised himself on his hind legs and started off at a furious speed, taking me with him.

"The sand sifted into my eyes, my ears, and my nostrils, blinding and suffocating me. I could scarcely breathe; a burning thirst was consuming me; I felt that I was dying. I said a silent good-bye to all the happiness that I was losing for ever; then oblivion came, and I remember no more.

"When I came to myself I found that I was under a woollen tent, draped with alternate stripes of red and yellow silk, and lying on a rug which covered the entire floor of the tent. I experienced a strange sense of well-being, a state of drowsiness, a delightful feeling of laziness; and I closed my eyes quickly, not caring to understand how a lieutenant of Chasseurs was metamorphosed into an Arab, master of a large tent. All at once, it seemed to me, a brighter light struck my eyelids, and, at the same time, a pungent, penetrating perfume filled the tent.

"I opened my eyes, and saw standing at my bedside a young woman, with great fathomless eyes, surmounted by two delicately-pencilled arches. Her black, glossy hair fell in curls down her neck, covering her cheeks with their warm shadows. She was dressed like the daughter of a wealthy house—with a *haik* that fell to her feet, disclosing a chemise of striped silk, supported at the waist by a leather belt, studded with silver and held together at the breast with a clasp of the same metal. Two enormous silver and coral rings hung from her ears; her arms were loaded with bracelets, and her fingers were covered with heavy rings.

"Acting on the realistic impression of my dream, I greeted the beautiful apparition with a most profound salaam, which was returned with salaams and gracious smiles, the beautiful Saharian displaying a set of transparent teeth behind scarlet lips. I made as if to seize the young woman; but she recoiled, frightened, overthrew the lamp, and fled, leaving me somewhat abashed.

"A few moments later, just as the first rays of the new day stretched itself towards my tent, an Arab entered. His tall, slender silhouette stood out distinctly against the light, as with a haughty sweep of his hand he lifted the curtain that hung at the entrance. He advanced towards me, and, noticing that I was looking at him in surprise, but with regained consciousness, he began to speak in a jargon composed of bad Italian, worse French, a little Spanish, and a good deal of Arabic. He bowed to me and inquired after my health. I returned his greeting, and, calling to my aid the little of Arabic I knew, I asked him how it happened that I was under this tent.

"He informed me that I was in one of his camel-hair houses; that after the tempest—during which he had been nearly buried himself—when he was returning from Ouargla, where he had gone to buy a store of provisions, he noticed lying in the sand an officer, whom his people believed dead, but who, after a careful examination, was found to have fainted and to have been only partly asphyxiated. He had ordered me to be placed on one of his camels, between two sacks of wheat.

"He then told me that he was the Agha of the Cheragas, allies of the Si Sala and all the tribes not submitted to our rule. I thanked him warmly, gave him my name, and asked him if I was his prisoner.

"'Why should you be. Your nation is not at war with mine. You are my guest, one whom God has sent me, fear nothing and get well. Here, drink this.' And this tall, handsome Arab handed me a cup of delicious coffee that renewed my strength and raised my spirits. He said that as soon as I should be able to stand the few hours' ride required to reach Mascara, he would see that I had the necessary escort. He gave orders to two tall negroes to aid me with my toilet; and those two giant valets proceeded to dress me in a fine garment of white wool, in which I must have looked like a priest of the Middle Ages.

"El Tahar ben Moussa showed me his village of tents and all his riches; from his working camels to his racing camels, whiter than snow and swifter than the wind; his horses; his provision tents filled with wheat, barley, oats, hashed meat mixed with cracked wheat, which the Arabs make into balls, and pots filled with dates that look like preserves; in fact, all that constitutes the fortune of an Arab, master of a large tent. He seemed much pleased by my admiration for his thoroughbreds and my compliments on the beauty of his son, a boy of ten years; but he took particular pains not to go near a certain tent, kept hermetically closed, but from which we could hear laughter and ejaculations.

"I was well enough acquainted with Arabian customs to know that I must not inquire about the women nor speak of my fair apparition. I was, however, quite hopeful of seeing her again, for I counted on feminine curiosity.

"At the dawn of the next day El Tahar came to excuse himself for leaving me alone a part of the day, as some expedition called him five or six leagues to the south. My aches and pains not having entirely subsided, and my great weakness still preventing me from accompanying the Agha, I could only witness his departure, followed by all of his horsemen; but with more joy than sorrow, I must own.

"The houri was continually in my mind, and I wished to see her. I prowled about the neighbourhood of the mysterious tent—I made an effort at least, for twice one of those giant valets, with menacing gestures, invited me to direct my promenade in another direction. Was I seen from the tent? Was my disappointment noticed? Annoyed and feverish, I lay down to take a nap, as is the custom in the village, when the beautiful Arab girl entered.

"She brought me a pitcher filled with a refreshing liquid that calmed my fever and quieted my nerves. We could scarcely understand each other, as I knew so little Arabic; but there are looks and gestures more eloquent than words.

"Our conversation was scarcely commenced. She had told me her name, and that she was the third wife of the Agha, when a great tramping of horses' feet was heard, and the barking of dogs filled us with terror. El Tahar had returned! How could she leave my tent without being seen? The wife of the Agha in the tent of a man, a Christian, and with her face unveiled! She wrung her hands in despair. The curtain, which served as a door, moved, lifted—she had just time to throw herself behind a wooden box, thinking herself concealed; but, alas! one of her little bare feet protruded from behind the box.

"The Agha entered, sat down, inquired about my health, spoke of the hunt. I seemed to be listening to his recital, but I could not understand anything. I replied at hazard. I was suffering torments; I could see nothing but the white foot, although I did not look at it.

"While speaking, El Tahar turned slightly. He could see it! I sat breathless. It seemed to me that the black eyes of the Agha—the only features of his face that I could see, for he had kept the black veil over his face, as do all the Tuaregs when away from home—glittered a moment as they fixed themselves upon the white spot; but I was mistaken, as he continued his recital quietly:

"As he rose to go he said somewhat solemnly: 'You are a guest whom God has sent me—I do not forget it.'

"I stood at the entrance of my tent as he moved away with slow and measured gait. The girl was obliged to wait until night before she could leave without being seen.

"An hour after this scene there was a great commotion in the village; a troop of cavalry had arrived. It was you, comrades, in search of my body, the sergeant-major and my men having carried to you the news of my certain death. You remember my reluctance to leave my tent and the manifest embarrassment in seeing you enter."

"Oh, yes. You didn't seem to be very happy over the effort we had made in searching you out, and the Agha himself was obliged to place you in the saddle after the feast he offered us."

Lieutenant Cursol's orderly entered the room just then.

"Lieutenant," he commenced.

"What do you wish?" asked Henri.

"There is a man outside who insists upon speaking to you, sir. A Tuareg. He wears his veil."

"A Tuareg? Tell him to come in."

"He will not dismount from his camel. He says he comes from yonder." And the soldier pointed in a direction over his shoulder to signify that it was some quite distant, uncertain place.

"Will you excuse me, gentlemen?"

"A message from his houri!" and the young officers rushed to the windows.

Before the steps was a camel, and sitting straight in his high seat was a Saharian, wrapped in a long bernouse, a black veil fastened under his eyes, and waiting motionless.

"I come from the Ouled Yakoud, and I bring to you a present from the Agha."

"A present for me?"

"Yes; here it is." And the Tuareg unfastened from his saddle a bag made from camel's hair.

He opened it and took out a black, hairy ball. He shook it, and from this head of hair appeared a bloodless face, with cold, blue lips, and eyes from whose orbs the light of life had for ever fled. It was a woman's head.

The Saharian flourished this head and threw it at the feet of the young man, who stood there as pale as Death himself.

"The Agha El Tahar ben Moussa sends this to you. Keep it." And, with a hoarse cry, the Tuareg started off at a wild gallop.

A month later, Lieutenant Henri Cursol was found one evening, within a few feet of one of the busiest streets of Mascara, lying dead with a dagger between his shoulders.

J. F.

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The Queen of Night.

By HEADON HILL,

Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," "The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.

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SUMMARY.

Gaston Vizard gives to Sir Simon Crawshay an introduction to the agent of the vessel *Queen of Night*, in order that he may make special arrangements with regard to the trip of his wealthy ward, Miss Challenor. Dr. Zavertal calls on Vizard, and informs him that a new captain will be wanted before the next cruise.

The *Queen of Night*, under the guise of a popular pleasure boat, is used in reality by a set of unscrupulous adventurers for the purpose of doing away with objectionable relatives.

In Chapter I. Cyril Forrester receives his dismissal from the Flower Steamship Company for breaking regulations while saving the life of Miss Aline Challenor. He applies for and obtains from Nathan and Co., of Fenchurch Street, the vacant command of the ocean yacht *Queen of Night*.

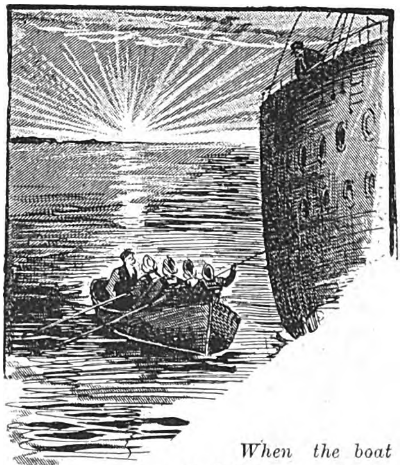
Becoming engaged to Miss Challenor (who comes in for a quarter of a million on attaining her majority), he obtains an interview with Sir Simon Crawshay, who promptly refuses a consent to his engagement, and informs him that his ward will be out of his way for the next six weeks, as she is about to take a cruise on board the *Queen of Night!* On going aboard he is introduced to Dr. Zavertal, among whose patients are Miss Challenor, the Earl of Darranmore (a boy of fourteen coming into £40,000 a year), and Desmond Orlebar, whose death however occurs when off Gibraltar.

A stowaway is discovered and put ashore.

CHAPTER X.

A Detective's Holiday.

When the boat reached the steamer's side the day was breaking, and I was not sorry to see Zavertal leaning over the rail watching our approach. I had missed the point at the time, but it had since struck me as curious that there should have been no light in the Doctor's cabin, if the stowaway's story of having gone there for medical relief were true. The needful remedies could hardly have been found and dispensed in the dark, and I had begun to fear that the man's "seeckness" was only an excuse covering some sinister design, of which perhaps Zavertal himself was the victim. While striving in vain to recall where I had previously heard the stowaway's familiar voice, I had reproached myself for not ascertaining whether the Doctor was all right before I left the ship, and the sight of him there, peering down at us through the gloom, was a relief.



When the boat reached the steamer's side the day was breaking.

As soon as I had mounted to the deck he advanced to meet me with a look of undisguised inquiry, and I noticed that in the grey dawn-light his face seemed singularly puckered and old.

"There is nothing wrong, sir, I hope—to cause this deviation from our programme?" he said, rather stiffly for him.

"Oh, dear no," I replied. "I merely ran into Barcelona to send a private telegram. I thought it a good opportunity, too, to get rid of the stowaway." Having found Zavertal safe and sound, the thought flashed across me that as he was not a victim of Enriquez, he might be a partner with him in something underhand, and that, in any case, it would be more discreet to say nothing for the present of having seen the man leave the surgery or of his sudden proficiency in English. I watched the Doctor narrowly for any sign of satisfaction or the reverse at the news, but he yielded none; did not even evince any interest.

"That was just as well, I dare say," was his careless reply, and then he went on to say:

"I am rather glad you have touched here, for it will give me an opportunity of procuring some drugs of which I have run short. I suppose you have no objection to my taking a boat and going ashore for an hour? I will not keep you longer."

Heaven knows, I am not over sharp, but I was sharp enough to see that if there was anything in my theory that there might be some mysterious bond of union between Zavertal and the stowaway this might only be a try-on to effect a meeting, and I promptly refused the request.

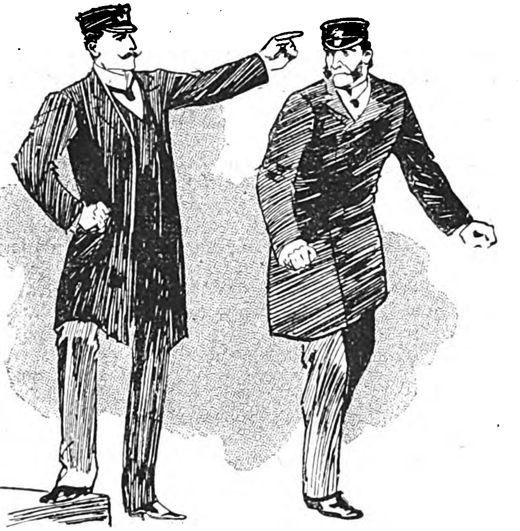
"It is quite out of the question," I said; "we sail at once," and to prevent further argument I sang out to the officer on the bridge to get under weigh. The engine-room bell rang in response to his signal, and I had already begun to mount the bridge-ladder to personally con the ship out of harbour before Zavertal grasped that there was no appeal from my decision. Then he sprang forward and took steps up the ladder after me, his face quivering as he hissed in a tone I had never heard him use before:

"You are not doing well by yourself, Captain Forrester. You have exceeded your instructions to defer to me in matters of this kind. It is you who will suffer."

"Go to your cabin, sir, and behave yourself, or I will land you at Genoa," I said sternly. "You seem to forget that I command this ship."

He slunk away scowling, and I went to my duty feeling that I had rather scored than otherwise by provoking this exhibition of temper on his part. The intense irritation into which my refusal had betrayed him suggested that there was some stronger motive for his wishing to go ashore than the replenishment of his medicine chest, and if there was a secret motive I was glad to have thwarted him. At the same time, a feeling of uneasiness that there was some mystery on the ship, with which I could not cope because I was ignorant of its nature, grew upon me, and I longed for my unknown correspondent to reveal himself. The indications that his advice had not been altogether uncalled for implanted in me a reliance in his judgment, and I should have liked to have further availed myself of it.

I wondered, too, as I set the steamer's head N.E. by E. out of the bay, whether there was now to be an open breach between Zavertal and myself, and what effect a quarrel between us would have on the harmony of the voyage. I had been conscious for several days of an increasing suspicion that there was another side to the Doctor's character besides the one that he presented to the public, and though



"Go to your cabin, sir, and behave yourself.'

I didn't care twopence about his relations with myself, I hoped he would not show temper to the annoyance of the passengers.

So far as this was concerned, my apprehensions were soon set at rest. When we were clear of the headlands I turned in for a couple of hours, and while I was dressing for breakfast my steward brought me a few lines from the Doctor begging forgiveness for his "unwarrantable outbreak." He could only account for it, he wrote, by his not having been able to sleep, and he sincerely trusted it "would make no difference to the kindness I had extended to him since I had commanded the *Queen of Night*." On the surface this made matters smooth, and I sent him a verbal message that I should think no more of the incident—a polite fiction, I am afraid, seeing that all the morning I continued in grave doubt whether the deference and joviality which he lavished upon myself and upon the passengers respectively were really genuine.

General Waldo's place at the saloon breakfast-table was still vacant, and inquiries from his bedroom steward elicited the fact that his gout, though better, did not permit of his leaving his cabin. The absence of the snowy-haired, apple-cheeked veteran, with his merry jests and yarns, was the subject of universal regret; and, at the request of a passenger with whom I was walking the deck, I put my head into the surgery and asked Zavertal if he had seen the old gentleman.

"Yes," was the unexpected reply; "I saw him half an hour ago, but not professionally. He wanted me to witness his signature to a will he has been amusing himself with making. I don't think, from his appearance, that he is seriously ill, but he declined to describe his symptoms to me—on the grounds that he never consults medical men."

"He is a queer old fish," I remarked, and I was turning to resume my promenade with the passenger when Zavertal called after me:

"By the way, the General will send for you, sir, I expect, to be the second witness. He was saying something about a will witnessed by a captain and a doctor being unassailable."

Sure enough, I had not taken two turns on deck when a steward came up to say that General Waldo would be greatly obliged if I would step down to his state-room on a matter of private business. Apologising to my fellow-promenader, I went down to the main deck at once, anticipating nothing but amusement from the interview. And, certainly, on my entrance into the state-room, the occupant's rueful countenance, framed in a huge red night-cap, contemplating a swathed foot with an expression of malignant hatred formed a typical picture of the "gouty subject" calculated to provoke a smile. But at that point amusement ended for me, once for all, for the rest of the cruise, and if I laughed during the next fortnight, God knows it must have been forced laughter. All was to be blind mistrust and dark groping; while, beyond, the shadow of a more definite terror was in store for me.

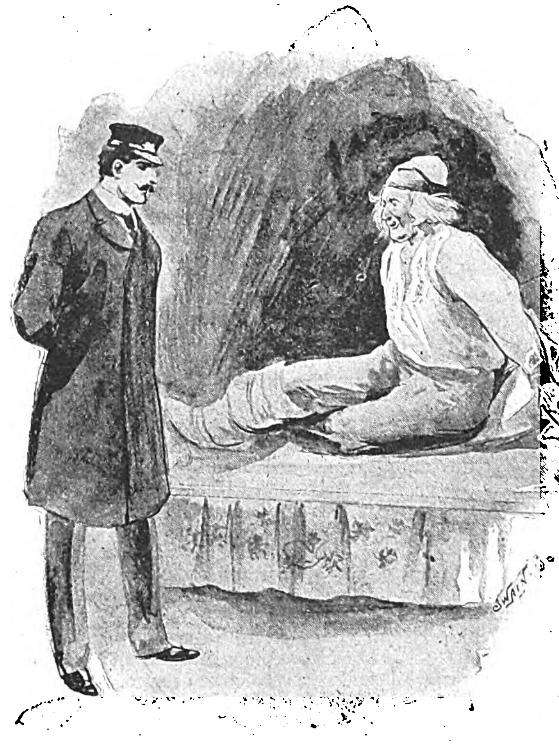
The moment I was inside the cabin, and Waldo saw that I was alone, his face changed, and he motioned to me to close the door. "Lock it," he added, in a voice so new to him and yet so strangely familiar to me that I knew he must have been acting. Feeling that I stood on the brink of a disclosure, I obeyed mechanically, and then turned to him again.

"Sit down on the bed, Captain Forrester," he said—the pronounced American accent was no longer noticeable. "Never mind my foot; it is as well as your own. We must not remain too long together, so let me be brief. It was I who wrote that letter on which you so wisely acted."

I could only mutter something incoherent. I should have been surprised at learning that the anonymous letter emanated from Waldo, as I had known him; but a greater surprise had gripped me—at the marvellous change in the man's manner. So far it was in manner only.

"Yes," he went on, "and I will give you a very good reason for that warning directly, but first let me set you at your ease. I can see that you are struggling with a sort of half-remembrance of our last meeting. There—perhaps that will assist you."

As he spoke his hands went quickly to his head, and in a twinkling he had whipped off the red night-cap and the snowy mop of hair, showing *the close-cropped, iron-grey poll of Kennard, the missing passenger, whom I had met in Nathan's office*. By a second adroit movement he detached the bushy eyebrows and relaxed some tension of feature that com-



A typical picture of the gouty subject.

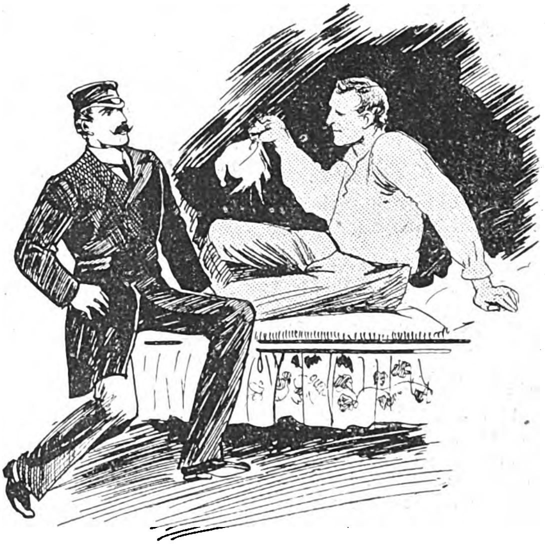
pleted a disguise so simple that only the proof I had received made me believe in its efficacy.

“I remember you very well,” I said, “but what is the——?”

“The meaning of this masquerade?” he caught me up. “That is what you are here to learn. And in case of interruption I must prepare you by saying that the will you were to witness is as bogus as my gout—invented for the sole purpose of throwing dust in the very wide-open eyes of Doctor Zavertal. I wanted to talk to you alone, and I thought he would be less likely to suspect the real nature of our conversation if I furnished him with a spurious sample of it first. Do you happen to know if he took the bait?”

“I begin to think that Zavertal is a difficult man to read, but he gave me the impression of having believed you,” I said. “He spoke rather contemptuously of the service you had asked of him, and he said that you intended to ask the same of me.”

“Good,” exclaimed Kennard, as I must now call him. “Now, as to that letter, I have not the slightest notion who Enriquez is, but I warned you against him because I believe that he came on board stowaway-fashion with Zavertal's knowledge and connivance, and Zavertal is without exception the most murderous villain as yet unhanged on God's earth. I am a detective, pretty well known on the other side of the Atlantic, and for the matter of that, on this, too, in certain circles, so that I do not speak without authority. I had him in my hands once, and he slipped through my fingers, or rather through one of the meshes in our sieve-like criminal code. The details of the case—I might say combination of cases—are immaterial here, but the man is one of the most expert professional poisoners who ever trafficked in human lives.”



The close-cropped, iron-grey poll of Kennard.

“Good heavens!” I exclaimed. “Then why not denounce him and hand him over to the authorities at the next port?”

“So I should if I could find anything fresh against him, but old scores have been wiped off by the verdict of the American jury, and I should only burn my fingers by bringing vagues charges,” replied Kennard. “I have noticed one or two suspicious circumstances during the voyage, and I may catch him tripping yet before it is over. I have the pull over him in this—that he does not suspect my identity, though he was a little uneasy about me on the first day, as I think you saw.”

“Yes,” I said. “But what was the reason for this disguise if, as you told me in Nathan's office, you are really on a holiday?”

Kennard smiled—not Waldo's senile grin, but his own sharp twinkle.

“Haven't you heard,” he said, “that when an actor gets a night off he generally spends it at the theatre? Well, in the same way, when I chanced upon Zavertal on the stairs of Nathan and Co.'s office, I——”

“It was him, then, whom you met on the way out?” I interrupted. “I did not know he was about there.”

“He was most certainly there, and drew a pistol on me under the impression that I was shadowing him,” proceeded Kennard. “After that meeting I made a few inquiries, and found that he was medical officer on the very steamer in which I was contemplating a trip. Then it struck me that it would be interesting to combine business with pleasure, and see how Zavertal was behaving, whether he was really on the square, or working on the old lines. I saw that if I was to make discoveries it would be useless to appear on board *in propria persona*, and so I booked as the doddering old idiot who is regarded as a sort of ship's-fool. But thinking that you would probably have mentioned my intention of going the voyage to Nathan, if not to Zavertal himself, I took the precaution of booking a second passage in my own name, and then of forfeiting it.”

“Your ruse has entirely misled him,” I said. “But, strangely enough, yours was not the only forfeited passage,” and I told him of the Mr. Vizard whom I had first seen in Zavertal's company on the day of my engagement, and of the latter's introduction of him to me as a perfect stranger on the occasion of my first visit to view the ship. I took the opportunity, too, in a shamefaced sort of way, of mentioning the sensation I had experienced in Nathan's office of having been watched by a pair of eyes of which, as soon as I saw them, Zavertal's instantly reminded me. Kennard did not laugh, as I had half feared, but, though he scanned my face seriously, passed on to say:

“Vizard's acquaintance with Zavertal can be considered later. At any rate, his name is not known to me in connection with the old affair. At present I am concerned with what has come under my own eyes, and made me thoughtful, if not exactly suspicious, since we left London. Item number one happened at dinner on the second day out, when young Darranmore was taken ill at table. You saw me get up and go over to where they had been sitting, after the boy's removal, under pretence of fetching a dish of pineapple? Well, that action was prompted by the sight of a piece of paper lying close to Zavertal's plate. What do you make of it?”

He handed me a strip of paper, on which was printed the one word:

“DIG.”

“Look at the back,” he added, with a smile at my blank stare of incomprehension.

“It seems to be a label,” I said, after turning it over, and perceiving that the back was gummed.

“If, as I think, it is a druggist's label,” replied Kennard, “the letters ‘Dig’ would be an abbreviation for ‘Digitalis,’ the name of a drug that specially affects the action of the heart, and which, given in sufficient quantities, is a deadly poison. Considering Zavertal's past record, the find led me to wonder whether Lord Darranmore's fainting-fit had an artificial origin.”

“But the boy didn't die, and the Doctor worked hard on both occasions to bring him round. That wasn't the act of a poisoner,” I remarked.

“My dear Captain Forester, I envy you your guilessness,” returned Kennard. “Supposing Zavertal had anything to gain by doing away with the lad he would prepare the ground first by introducing a few fainting-fits just to allay suspicion when he administered a fatal dose. See; he has reaped the advantage already. He has furnished you with an argument in his defence.”

I was obliged to admit his superior 'cuteness. “And where does the stowaway come in?” I asked.

“Ah, there you have me—at present,” was the reply. “I ascertained, however, that in that game of hide-and-seek

Darranmore went and unearthed him from the launch on Zavertal's initiative, which looks very much as if the finding of the stowaway was an accident done on purpose. But it was a more definite circumstance that prompted me to write you that letter, and then to lay up here so that there should be no suspicion of collusion between us."

"And that circumstance was?" I asked.

"That the stowaway brought Desmond Orlebar his last drink, and then, by smashing the glass, destroyed all traces of its composition," replied Kennard gravely.

CHAPTER XI.

The Overland Arrival.

"You place upon me a very heavy responsibility as captain of this vessel," I said after a long pause. "Do I understand you to bring a charge of murder against Zavertal and Enriquez?"

"By no means; I have not adequate evidence to substantiate one," replied Kennard. "I am only putting you on your guard, so that there may be another pair of eyes besides my own to watch unceasingly. Don't disregard trifles. Why, on that day at Gibraltar I spotted Zavertal leading up to Orlebar's burst by pretending to persuade him to the contrary—a sure move with a man of the drunkard's temperament. I am positive that Zavertal intended him to slip the rest of the party."

"Preparing the ground again—by letting him drink himself ill," I hazarded.

"Precisely: but if so it was nearly overdone that time," replied Kennard. "The wretched fellow was so bad that he swore off, and by noon next day was a lot better. He told me so himself ten minutes before he died, though Zavertal described him to me as *in extremis*—a significant discrepancy. By the way did you have any trouble with Enriquez?"

I told him of the man's reappearance at the top of the landing-steps, of the pointed revolver, of the suddenly-acquired English, and of the strangely familiar sound of the voice in which the stowaway threatened me.

"All tends the same way, you see—to danger ahead from those two," said Kennard. "And so you cannot remember where you heard the voice before?"

"No, I can't place him."

"Well, I'll try and place him for you," proceeded Kennard, readjusting his disguise. "I won't risk making a wrong shot yet, but—first tell me when we are due to leave Genoa?"

"We arrive there at noon to-morrow, barring accidents, and leave the same time the following day," I replied.

"Then I think that within forty-eight hours I shall be able to tell you where you met the stowaway before. And now you have been here long enough. I am going to 'recover' this afternoon, so we shall meet at the dinner table, but at other times it will be well for us to be seen together as little as possible. I shall be at work in my own way, and you shall be posted in all fresh developments."

On leaving Kennard's cabin, I went straight to my own room, and shut myself in to review the position as calmly as I could. The more I looked at it the more I was convinced that there was absolutely nothing to be done. The American detective himself had said that there was no evidence—only suspicion—and a nice fool I should make of myself if I openly accused Zavertal of being engaged in a wholesale attempt to poison passengers.

Again, I could not safely suspend him on the grounds of his being a known bad character. Even by Kennard's showing he had been acquitted of the charge that had been brought, and he had been trusted by the owners long before they had heard of me. Further, Kennard was just as much a stranger to me, and, for all I knew, quite as likely to be a scoundrel, with some ulterior object of his own in view, as was Zavertal. It was true I was prepossessed in the American's favour, while I had come to distrust the Doctor; but against this, there was the set-off of the former being a disguised man travelling under an *alias*—hardly a recommendation for implicit confidence.

And yet it was a horrible strain to think that Kennard's story of the past, and fears for the future, might *not* be baseless, and that we might have a murderer in our midst with a roving commission to destroy life. Kennard had only mentioned suspicions in two cases, and it was strange that these were two out of the three which Zavertal had indicated as serious on the first day out. I started in terror at the thought that the third was Aline herself, and it flashed upon me that Zavertal might have named these three cases in order to pave the way for the fatal termination he meant to secure. And yet where was the motive—what could be the inducement for his turning his hand against three utterly unconnected strangers who could never have injured him?

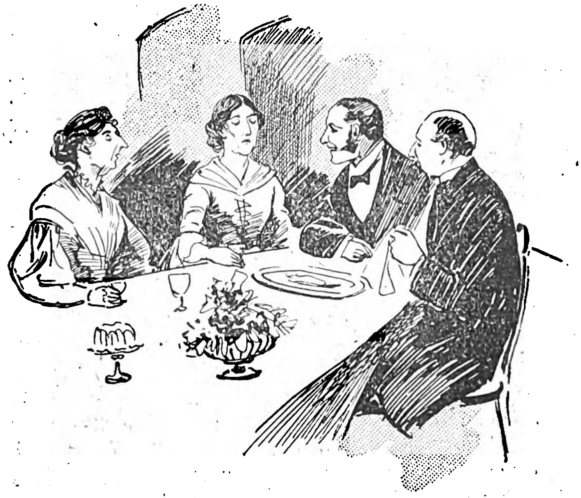
The problem was beyond me; but I found temporary comfort in one thing, that for forty-eight hours at least there would be no fear of mischief. Granting that there was real danger, Zavertal would not dare to strike a fatal blow till he was able to avail himself of sea burial, and that would not be till after we should have sailed from Genoa two days hence. In the meanwhile I decided not to depend too much on Kennard, but to keep a good lookout all round on my own account, and if anything occurred which, in my judgment as captain of the ship, called for instructions from the owners I could cable Nathan from Genoa.

But during the ensuing twenty-four hours nothing happened to mar the serenity of the voyage as the *Queen of Night* cut through the blue waters that wash the southern shores of France. Past rock-girt Monaco, under the brow of Cap Martin, within sight of the orange groves of the Riviera, we steamed merrily, no sign of the black care that filled the heart of the Captain finding place amid the racket of festivity that prevailed on board. Kennard, in his resumed character of General Waldo, gave no fresh warning, and the Doctor pervaded the ship with his genial forethought for the comfort of all.

As for sickness there was none on board, Lord Darranmore having quite recovered from his last fit, and in short, as I whispered to Kennard next morning, there was no peg to hang a rag of suspicion on.

"Wait," he said quietly, and turned away.

We were steaming steadily for the Molo Vecchio as he spoke, Genoa, the Superb, being well in sight ahead, rising tier above tier on its amphitheatre of hills, from the bustling thriving streets of the port in front to the stately groups of palaces beyond. The passengers were all on deck, forming parties and making plans to visit the picture



Supported only by a clergyman and a couple of old maids.

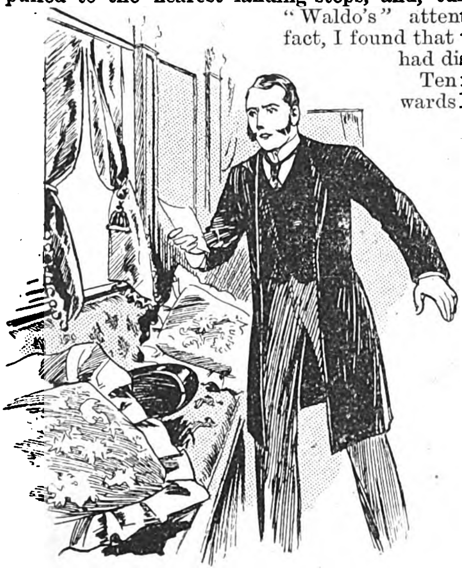
galleries and palaces of the ancient city; but on this occasion I meant to remain on board, influenced, I am not ashamed to say, by the fact that Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth had expressed their intention of not going ashore. They had not yet sufficiently forgotten the unpleasant incident at Gibraltar to be anxious for more sight-seeing.

We came to an anchor half an hour after noon, and the shore parties lost no time in leaving the ship. Neither Kennard or Zavertal had confided their plans to me, though I expected that the latter would be certain to attach himself to one of the parties in his usual capacity of showman and master of the ceremonies. When luncheon was served in the nearly deserted saloon it was, therefore, a surprise to see him seated at the head of his table, supported only by a clergyman and a couple of old maids who disliked getting in and out of boats. At my own table only Aline and her companion took their places, though half-way through the meal another surprise was forthcoming in the entrance of "General Waldo," who explained that a twinge of gout had warned him at the last moment to stay on board.

"Quite right, General," Zavertal called across from the other table; "I, too, am taking a rest to-day. We will have a game of chess together after tiffin if you like."

But, though Kennard assented in his feigned voice and pronounced drawl, the game was not destined to come off between them—at least, not over a chess-board. A minute or two later a steward brought Zavertal a letter, and informed him that it had been brought by a boat from the shore. After hurriedly reading it the Doctor came over to us and said: "I must go ashore after all, I find. I have just heard from an old student friend of mine that he is staying in Genoa for a few days, and he wants me to spend an hour or two with him at the Hotel de Genes. Our game of chess must be postponed, I am afraid, General."

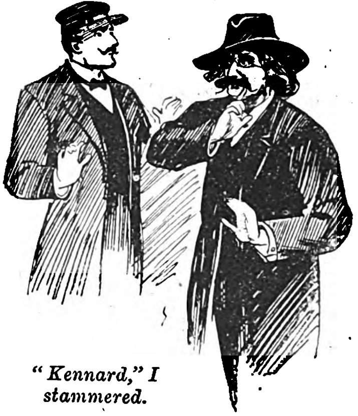
There was a trace of suppressed excitement in his tone, and he turned and left the saloon at once. Kennard exchanged a meaning glance with me, but finished a yarn with which he was amusing Aline without making any reference to the Doctor's altered arrangements. When we all adjourned to the upper deck I clearly made out Zavertal a quarter of a mile away in a shore-boat that was being rapidly pulled to the nearest landing-steps, and, turning to call "Waldo's" attention to the fact, I found that the detective had disappeared.



Hurriedly reading it.

Ten minutes afterwards I was passing forward to speak to the chief engineer, when I was accosted by a shabby, foreign-looking man, who might have been an Italian opera tout or vendor of curios. I had given strict orders for none of these gentry to be allowed on board, and was on the point of letting the stranger have "a bit of the skipper's tongue," when he checked me with a whispered injunction to "keep calm."

"Kennard?" I stammered.

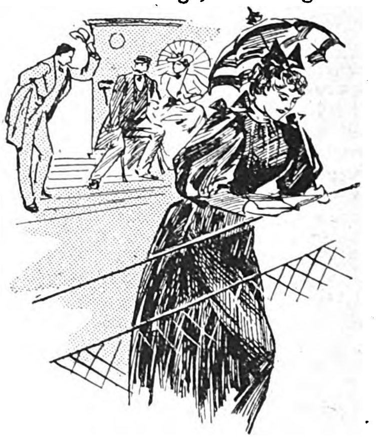


"Kennard," I stammered.

"Yes," he said. "I am off to shadow our friend the Doctor. There's something in the wind. He was waiting for that letter. Expect me back when you see me—in the character of Waldo, of course. I am taking the needful make-up along," touching a black handbag he carried. "When he returns I shan't be far behind him. Don't relax your vigilance, Captain, because the enemy is absent. He may be represented, for all we know."

He was over the side and into a shore-boat before I could reply, and to tell the truth I was nearly as glad to be rid of him as of the Doctor, with his disguises and mystery-making. After settling matters with the engineer, I went aft and spent the happiest time of the whole voyage, sitting with Aline under the awning all the sunny afternoon, while Mrs. Brinkworth played propriety.

Aline was particularly anxious to extract a promise from me to give up the sea after our marriage, but though she worked hard to secure it, she failed to shake my determination not to be dependent on my wife's bounty. I was in the midst of an argument on the loss of self-respect that would arise from such a position, when the first boat laden with returning sightseers came alongside.



Mrs. Brinkworth played propriety.

Two minutes later the voice of someone who had approached us silently startled me into a sense of present realities.

"Good evening, Captain Forrester," the new-comer was saying. "Better late than never, you see. I missed you before, but rather than lose the trip altogether, I have hurried on overland to join you here."

It was Vizard, the passenger who had failed to put in an appearance when we left London, who was standing before us. His tall, commanding figure was set off by a well-cut tourist suit, and he carried an expensive travelling-rug over his arm. His swarthy face looked courteously down at us, and he raised his hat in recognition of Aline's presence.

But for all that I was certain that there was no mistake. I recognised his voice at once. It was the voice which had been puzzling me for the last three days—*the voice in which Enriquez, the stowaway, had threatened me from the landing-steps in the harbour of Barcelona.*

(To be continued.)

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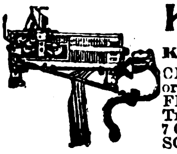

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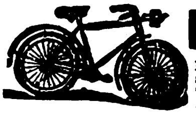

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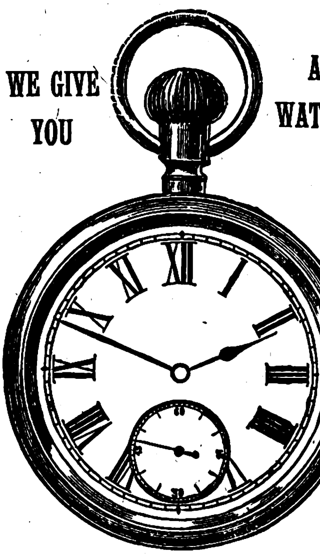

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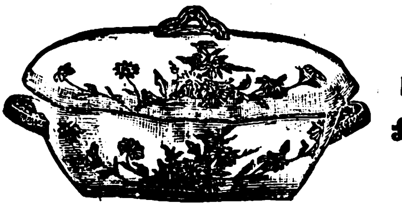

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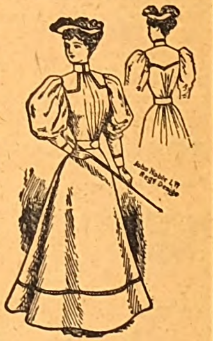

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Edited by
C. Arthur Pearson.

For the Week ending October 26th, 1895.

A Silent Witness.

"YOU see that old tumble down cottage over there?" pointing with his whip across the moor, in the direction of the sea, "well, in that very house within a month of my coming to settle down here I very nearly lost my life; it is a long story, but as we have a longish way to go, it will serve to pass the time if I tell it."

The speaker was an old college chum, who I had lost sight of for many years, until one day walking down Regent Street we ran across each other accidentally, as people do almost every day in London, which, despite its vastness, is a wonderful place for unexpected meetings.

The upshot of our conversation was a promise on my part to pay a visit to my old friend at his home in the wilds of Yorkshire, and the time having arrived the promise had been duly fulfilled.

"When I came here first," the Doctor continued, "I had no idea my stay would be a prolonged one, but now I have got used to the place and the people and I have no inclination to move.

"Needless to say, the town in which I am living has grown considerably, and if I liked I might do very well in the way of town practice, without touching the outlying districts on the moor at all. But it was amongst the moor folk that I gained my first experiences, and although one of them consisted of the awful ordeal I am about to relate to you, I have never felt inclined to take leave of them.

"And then, too, I am naturally fond of the grand moorland scenery, and the invigorating air, which blows straight across, direct from the sea; in fact, I often say my present surroundings have kept me a young man long beyond my time.

"Well, to resume my story, when I came here in 1873, the summer was just merging into autumn, and I had taken over together with the practice my predecessor's gig and a somewhat antiquated specimen of a Yorkshire cob, who if not particularly fast was accredited with knowing every inch of the moor.

"There were no regular roads, beyond roughly defined tracks, so I made up my mind to do as much walking as possible before the bad weather came on to prevent it.

"It was on one of these pedestrian expeditions that the circumstances I am about to narrate occurred. I had received a message, asking me to attend a patient, on what was called the 'far side of the moor,' where there were some half dozen cottages occupied by men who worked in the stone quarries we passed a while ago. They had not been developed then to the extent they are now. About two miles from the little hamlet was the old cottage you have just seen, but then it was an inn, 'The Travellers' Rest,' and did not bear too good a reputation in the neighbourhood.

"The day being exceptionally fine, and my one horse having had two or three long journeys in the week already, I decided to walk; and, having slung my small medicine case on my back, started out in good time, being anxious, if possible, to get there and back before nightfall, my predecessor having been particular to urge upon me the necessity of never being out on the moor after dark, not so much for fear of any danger that might occur from evil-disposed individuals who I might encounter, but from the fact that unless thoroughly well

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acquainted with the various landmarks I should be sure to get lost, and have to spend the night in the open air.

"I do not think there would be much danger of that now, but then everything was new and strange to me, and that made all the difference.

"On my way I had occasion to pass 'The Travellers' Rest,' and I well remember how I was struck with the desolate appearance of the place, which did not seem to do much of a trade, and I wondered how the proprietor managed to eke out a living at all.

"I was not long after in arriving at my destination, and having attended to the two or three patients, none of which required any great amount of doctoring at my hands, I prepared to set out on my homeward journey in good time. As one of the cases was likely to require my services again in the course of a day or two—a young girl suffering from an affection of the eyes, for which it was necessary to use a syringe—I felt half inclined to leave my instruments behind me till I came again, but thinking I might want something or other in the case in the interval, I decided not to do so.

"At the time, my resources being limited, my stock of instruments were correspondingly so; and, instead of a proper eye douche, I had to use a large syringe, which could be regulated to throw a gentle spray, or a regular miniature shower bath; it was well for me it was so. Having given the girl's mother directions as to keeping the eye constantly bathed with warm water, and promising to call again in the course of a day or two, I set out with the springy step of a young man to do my twelve-mile tramp.

"Before I had proceeded a mile upon my way, I became aware of a peculiar cold damp feeling in the air, and, looking away seaward, I at once divined the cause—sea-fog. Within a few minutes it had made its way over the cliffs, and, rolling along in a dense volume, had soon obscured everything around; I could not, in fact, see my hand in front of me.

"Suddenly, as I was cautiously groping my way along, I found my further progress impeded by the corner of a stone wall, and it at once occurred to me that I must be at 'The Travellers' Rest.' Under ordinary circumstances I might have hesitated, but situated as I was the idea of shelter of any description was welcome to me, and having felt my way to the front door, I knocked.

"It was opened after a minute or two's delay by a man wearing a slouch hat which effectually concealed his features, and who asked me in a gruff tone of voice what I wanted. I replied that I was the new doctor who had come from Yoresley, and as I felt it would be impossible for me to make my way across the moor I should be glad if he could put me up for the night.

"His reply was not altogether reassuring. 'We ain't got no accomodation for the likes of you, but there's a shakedown in the upstairs room, and you can have that if you like.'

"'I was just going to turn in,' he continued, 'and if you don't want anything to eat—I've got nothing but bread and cheese, the missus has gone to town to-day and won't be back this weather, I'm thinking—I may as well show you your room; this way'—and taking up the old-fashioned horn lantern, the only light in the place, he proceeded to lead the way upstairs. 'Will ye have a drink?' he said, pausing at the foot of the staircase; 'if so, help yourself,' pointing to a bottle labelled whiskey—poison I thought to myself would be nearer the mark, probably—that stood on the table.

"I declined the offer, and followed him upstairs. 'I'll give you a call in the morning. What time shall I come?'

"'Oh, about eight o'clock, please. Good-night;' and without making any reply, beyond a grunt, he went down the rickety stairs.

"When he had gone—he had left me the lantern—I looked round the place in which I was to spend the night, my first object being to see what sort of fastening there was to the door.

"To my dismay I saw there was nothing beyond an ordinary latch, and that proved on investigation to be out of order!

"I had made up my mind not to go to sleep, not liking the look of the place and knowing that the house had the reputation of being visited occasionally by men who were not over particular; in fact, I had heard one or two stories of robbery and violence, and I was not inclined to add to the number; so instead of lying down on the bed I took off my great coat and put it between the blankets—sheets there were none—and putting the pillow inside the coat saw with satisfaction that anyone at first sight might easily mistake it for a sleeping man.

"You may wonder what made me so suspicious of foul play, and even now I cannot account for the feeling, or presentiment, which was borne in upon me. As events turned out, however, it was well founded.

"Having made this preparation for my safety, my next idea was, as you may suppose, to arm myself with anything that might be handy—a poker for choice—and await events. A glance at the fireplace showed me that there were no fire-irons there, and on looking round the room I saw that, with the exception of the low truckle bedstead, a nickel washstand, with a basin but no jug, and a small deal table, there was absolutely nothing I could lay hands on for the purpose of self-defence.

"When I realised my helpless position a sickening feeling of despair came over me, and I made up my mind to prepare for the worst. Suddenly I remembered my medicine case, and that in it I had my set of surgical knives—the biggest of which would stand me in good stead. With trembling fingers I undid the clasp, only to remember as I did so that that very morning I had had occasion to use a lancet for lancing a boil on a boy's neck, and that I had left the case in my surgery.

"Then the syringe caught my eye, and a plan of self-preservation, if nothing else, at once suggested itself. It was, as I have said, a powerful one, and when fully charged would throw its contents with considerable force. The next question to arise was how much acid remained in the bottle. To my intense relief it was nearly full, and, whereas, in a weakly diluted state as I had been using it for the child's eyes during the afternoon, it would act beneficially, used at its present full strength its effect would be to blind a man more or less permanently, if not altogether.

"You may be sure I did not stay to weigh the consequences of what might occur, but, inserting the nozzle of the syringe in the bottle, had the satisfaction of noticing that, as the contents were sucked up, they nearly expanded the india-rubber casing to its fullest extent.

"With a heartfelt ejaculation of relief I crouched down by the side of the bed furthest from the door, and held my breath listening intently for any sound.

"I ought to have told you that after the landlord had left me, I heard him moving about downstairs for awhile, and then all was quiet—possibly he had gone to bed after all, and my fears and suspicions were unfounded.

"Overcome by my day's exertions, I began to feel myself actually dozing, when a sound which caught my ear, effectually dispelled any idea of sleep, a creaking of the stairs unmistakably denoted that someone was approaching.

"I had, as you may suppose, blown out the light in the lantern, but the moon had risen and the room was almost as light as day, so that I could see the door quietly pushed back and the head and shoulders of a man appear inside; in his right hand he carried a heavy iron crowbar, such as the quarrymen use, and he still wore the slouched hat, so that I could not discern his features.

"By a supreme effort I had managed from the time I heard the first sound to breathe heavily, as if fast asleep, and, although I could plainly hear my heart beating, managed to keep up the deception, which effectually answered its purpose. For, after listening a moment, as if to make quite sure, the fellow made a dash forward to the bed, and, with both hands uplifted, brought down the crowbar two or three times in succession on what he imagined to be my head (either blow would have been more than enough to kill me, I realised), and then, just as he was in the act of bending down to make sure, and probably to do the rest in the way of robbery, I shot forth my right hand and discharged the full volume of acid immediately under the brim of his hat.

"The demoniacal yell he gave told me plainly that it had taken effect, and then the ordeal I had gone through proved too much for me, and I must have swooned away.

"When I came to myself I was alone.

"Hastily scrambling to my feet, I made my way downstairs, and there in the kitchen, lying across the table with his head resting on his arms, and an empty whiskey bottle by his side, was my late adversary. His heavy stentorian breathing showed that he was alive, and I judged that, maddened by the action of the acid on his face and eyes, he had sought to drown the pain he experienced by reducing himself to a state of drunken insensibility.

"My first idea was to get away from the place without delay, but it occurred to me that if the man recovered before I could summon the assistance of a constable (which meant several hours probably) and return, he might decamp, as he probably would, and as I had not so much as caught a glimpse of his features it would be impossible for me to swear to him. You will say I might, in his stupefied condition have easily made him secure by binding his hands and feet where he lay, but I was in too much terror of the man to attempt it, and I had recourse to my medicine chest once more; in it I had I knew a small phial of nitrate of silver, and a camel's-hair brush for its application.

"Nitrate of silver, as you are doubtless aware, although leaving no mark when first put on, turns to black if exposed to the action of the sun. Where to put a mark so as not to arouse his suspicions, should he see it, was my object, and I decided on the back of the neck.

"Carefully turning down his neckcloth, with trembling fingers I applied the preparation to the bare flesh, until a space about the size of a five-shilling piece had been covered; just as I finished the fellow gave signs of recovering consciousness, and I lost no time in making for the door.

"Once well away from the place my feelings of thankfulness for my escape may be well imagined, and on thinking over the matter I determined, as I was well out of it, to keep my own council and not report it to the authorities, as had been my intention; it does not do a doctor any good at any time to be mixed up with police court proceedings, but as events proved, the facts came out in an altogether unexpected manner.

"Two days later I was again journeying in the direction of 'The Travellers' Rest,' driving this time, when to my surprise I observed quite a crowd round the house.

"On approaching, I asked one of the men what was up, and he informed me, as if it was a matter of no very unusual occurrence, that a man, apparently a tourist, had been found dead in the place, and the inquest was then being held.

"Anxious to hear the facts of what might have been my own fate, I went in. The landlord, whose face showed signs of the terrible ravages the acid had inflicted, was in the act of telling his story. The murdered man, a perfect stranger to him, he said, had come to the house on the preceding afternoon, and having made himself at home in the parlour, consumed a considerable quantity of spirits. When asked for payment, he declared he had no money, and followed up this statement by throwing some corrosive fluid in his face, doubtless with the idea of temporarily blinding him and thus making his escape; that he, the landlord, maddened by pain, and having in his hand an iron bar with which it was his custom to bar the window, struck at him in his impotent fury, and must have hit him on the head, although he had not, he assured the Coroner, any intention of killing the man.

"The story sounded plausible enough, and from the fact that no letters or papers had been found on the murdered man which would lead to his identification, had I not providentially appeared on the scene the verdict would probably have been 'Justifiable homicide'; but when I stepped forward and requested to be allowed to make a statement, the man's face suddenly became ashen pale.

"As briefly as possible I narrated the circumstances of the eventful night, which was evidently received with suspicion, the Coroner pointing out that it was strange I had not thought fit to report the matter to the police. I explained my reasons, but still he was not satisfied, and was about to adjourn the inquiry, when I asked that the man's neckcloth might be removed, at the same time stating my reason in a low tone of voice to the Coroner; his ejaculation of 'Good Heavens, man,' produced a visible impression upon those assembled, and he himself came forward to loosen the handkerchief.

"'Where did you say?'

"'Just there,' indicating the spot with my finger. There was no mark visible there beyond a certain redness!

"'Go over to the light, sir,' I said excitedly, the sun shining brightly at the time.

"Hardly had the words left my mouth, than gradually what had been a circular red spot assumed a darker hue, and in less than a minute it had become perfectly black.

* * * * * *

"The man subsequently confessed to the murder, and a careful search about the house disclosed certain of the murdered man's effects, which proved his identity.

"A month after the murderer was hanged in York Gaol, and nobody being inclined to take the house it has remained empty, as you now see it, ever since.

"Strange things happen to us doctors at times, you say—they do indeed."

Peter Parr.

✣ GOLDEN ✱ STAR. ✣

- - A Romance - -

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

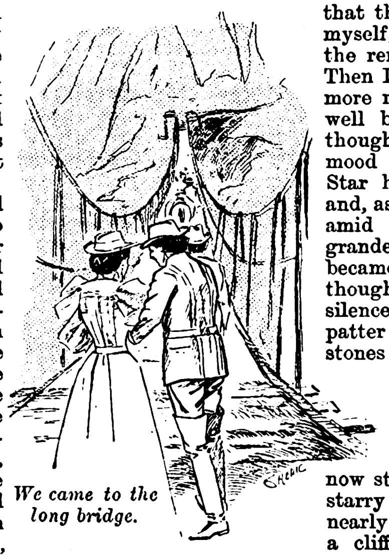
On the eve of the fall of the Inca empire Vilcaroya marries Golden Star, and with her drinks a potion, the result of which is a death-like trance, in hope of fulfilling the prophecy that the empire shall be restored by one who has come alive from the grave. Three hundred and sixty years later Professor Lamson brings, as he thinks, Vilcaroya's mummy from Peru to England. His friend Djama believes that he can restore it to life, and does so. Six months later the party return to Peru, Ruth, Djama's sister, going with them. At Panama they meet Hartness, a friend of Lamson's, who joins in the expedition. Arrived in Cuzco, Vilcaroya put himself into communication with the remnant of his people, and prepares to begin his work. He summons one Tupac-Rayca to meet him with twenty others of the old Inca blood on the Rodadero, a plain behind the great fortress. The same night at dinner he accidentally reveals the fact that Golden Star was his sister as well as his wife. It is explained to him that such a union as this is impossible in the modern world. Later on the same night he entices Djama on to the Rodadero and bids his men blindfold him. He then leads them by a way of which he only knows the secret into the Hall of Gold, a subterranean chamber in which some of the treasures of the Incas are hidden, where he dresses himself in the imperial robes, and then, seated on a throne, he receives the oath of allegiance from Tupac and his comrades. He shows Djama the treasures, and promises to load him with them if he will restore Golden Star to life, and threatens him with death if he reveals what he has seen. After this he has some of the gold taken to their lodgings, and with part of this buys a convenient hacienda in the country, and in due course they set out for the resting-place of Golden Star.

CHAPTER XIII.

At the Grave of Golden Star.

For five long days we travelled slowly and toilfully on our way from the valley of Cuzco to the resting-place of Golden Star. Over high plains and pleasant valleys; through deep, dark gorges and ravines, to whose lowest depths the sun but seldom reaches, and then but for an hour or two; along narrow pathways cut into the living rock on the mountain side, with precipices on one hand falling thousands of feet into the dark abysses, where the torrents roared and foamed, and on the other the great rock-walls of the mountain soaring up into the sky yet more thousands of feet above us.

I saw the mighty crests of Saljantai and Umantai rising snow-crowned from earth to heaven, unchanged in their eternal grandeur since the long-distant day on which I had last beheld them. I rode with saddened heart past the ruins of Lima Tambo, remembering how fair and stately a city it had been in the days before the plunderer and the oppressor came. We toiled slowly over the great, sharp-ridged range which parts the waters of the Vilcamayo from those of the Apurimac—the "Great Speaker"—then, descending again by the gorge of the river, which is now called the Rio de la Banca, we came to the long bridge which swings in mid air from rock to rock across the chasm through which the "Great Speaker" rolls his swift, roaring flood. Its cables were loosened, and its floor-way broken, for, like all things else in the land, the Spaniards had suffered it to fall well-nigh to ruin; and as I led Joyful Star across it by the hand, I thought of what it had been in the olden times when not a rope or a stick was suffered to be out of place, and when the Son of the Sun had been borne across it in his golden travelling litter, with long processions of his adoring people going before and behind him, strewing his way with flowers, and waking the echoes of these gloomy gorges with the melody of their songs and laughter.



We came to the long bridge.

From here we journeyed on, each night facing the setting sun, for two days more, ever winding higher and higher up into the mountains, until at length, on the fifth evening, I, riding alone many yards in front of the others, found the sign that I was looking for—a rock with three seats carved on the top of it—and turned my mule from the track and rode over the rough, stony ground up the side of the mountain until what looked from the road a single mountain peak opened into two. I beckoned to the rest to follow me, and when they came up I said to the Professor:

"Do you know where you are now—have you ever been here before?"

He looked about him and shook his head, saying:

"This may have been the place where we got off the road when one of our cargo-mules gave out, but I don't recognise it. Do you mean that we are near the valley?"

"Yes," I said. "Do you not remember seeing yonder two peaks from the shore of the lake near where you found me?"

He looked at them for a moment, and then said:

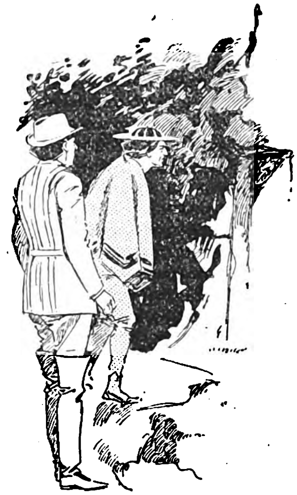
"Yes, I remember them, but they don't look the same, and I don't believe I could find my way back into the valley from here to save my life. It's very strange how I can have forgotten it so completely."

I smiled as he said this, knowing that I had brought them purposely many miles out of the way by which he had found the valley by accident, for I had no desire that the way should be known to any but myself, and those I had chosen from among the remnant of the Children of the Blood. Then I bade them follow me again, and once more rode on alone ahead, for, as you may well believe, I was too full of my own thoughts and hopes and fears to be in any mood for conversation, even with Joyful Star herself. They, too, talked but little, and, as we rode on in the deepening gloom amid the solemn silence and the gaunt grandeur of the mountains, their words became fewer and fewer, till at length thought took the place of speech, and the silence was broken by no sound save the patter of the mules' feet and the rattle of stones under their iron-shod hoofs.

Hour after hour I led them on, turning from valley to valley on the road that was visible only to my own eyes, and ever rising higher and higher towards the twin peaks that now stood out dark and sharp against the starry sky. At last, when our watches were nearly marking ten o'clock, I stopped before a cliff covered with bushes and creeping grasses, and, calling Tupac to me, I bade him seek for an opening under these.

He groped about among the bushes for a while, and then suddenly, with a short cry of surprise, he vanished, as it seemed, through the face of the rock itself. I dismounted and followed him, and found him standing behind the bushes facing a square doorway cut in the rock, and lined with masonry. Behind it, and closing it completely, was a great slab of dressed stone. Down the sides of the doorway were two square pillars of stone, and in the middle of the one to the left hand three little lines had been cut about a finger's breadth apart, but so faintly that only one who knew they were there could find them.

I stretched a string across from the middle one of these to the right-hand pillar, and where the string ended in the centre of the pillar I felt with my finger-tips, and found a little circle about as big round as an English two-shilling piece. Tupac had in his hand the iron rod that I had used on the Rodadero. I took it from him, and, placing the end against the circle, told him to push with me, and, to his wonder, the rod sank, seemingly into the solid stone, forcing out a bolt of stone which had been fitted so cunningly into the pillar that the end of it looked no more than a circle traced on the pillar.


Facing a square doorway cut in the rock.

When we had pushed the rod in about six inches I bade Tupac help me to pull it round towards the door. The pillar turned on a central hinge as we did so, and the great stone slab swung back by its own weight, which we had thus released, opening the entrance to a tunnel high enough for a man to walk through erect. This tunnel sloped somewhat sharply upwards, and looking up it I could see, shining in the clear sky beyond the upper entrance, the stars that I knew were reflected in the still waters of the little lake by which Golden Star was sleeping the sleep out of which we had come to arouse her.

As the passage was not large enough for the mules to go through with their burdens, I bade my men unload them and carry their loads through into the valley. Then we followed, leading our mules by the bridle, and after us the cargo mules were driven through. The load of one of the mules was a long narrow case of wood like that in which the Professor had taken my inanimate form to London, but this was thickly and softly padded inside with wool and lined with white linen, and at one end was a little pillow of the softest down, on which the head of Golden Star would soon be resting.

As soon as we were all standing outside the upper mouth of the tunnel I looked at Joyful Star and said:

"Is not this a fitting resting-place, even for the daughter of kings? Are not the stars bright in the heavens and on the bosom of the lake? Are not the mountains great, and strong, and silent? Do they not guard her couch well, and does not the snowy peak of Umantai yonder point the straight way to the Mansions of the Sun, where the soul of Golden Star is even now waiting for the arts of your brother to call it back to earth as he called mine?"

"Yes," she said, looking about her, first at the stars and then at the vast shapes of the mountains which loomed huge and dim on every side. "Yes, Vilcaroya, it is a good place for sleep, but is not the world beyond a good place to wake in? Have you not found it so?"

I caught the gleam of her eyes in the starlight, as she looked towards me saying this, and, by the glory of the Sun, had we stood alone where we were, I should have forgotten all, save the knowledge that I was the lawful lord of all this land and that she was there in the midst of it with me. For the instant I had gone back to my old life, with all its old-world thoughts and customs, and then, before I could answer her, my dreaming soul was called back to the present by the cold quiet voice of her brother saying:

"I don't think that very many would find the world an unpleasant place to wake in, either for the first or the second time, if they could also wake up lord of illimitable treasures, as Vilcaroya here has done. But come, your Highness, and you, Professor; it is getting late. Don't you think it is time to be thinking about camping?"

The matter-of-fact words scattered my dreams in an instant, and I woke from them into the present. I bade Tupac have the animals tethered and fed, and the tents we had brought with us pitched in the most sheltered place he could find; and while they were doing this, and Djama and the others were busy seeing that the work was done to their satisfaction, I went to Ruth and said, in a low tone that trembled with I know not how many mingled passions:

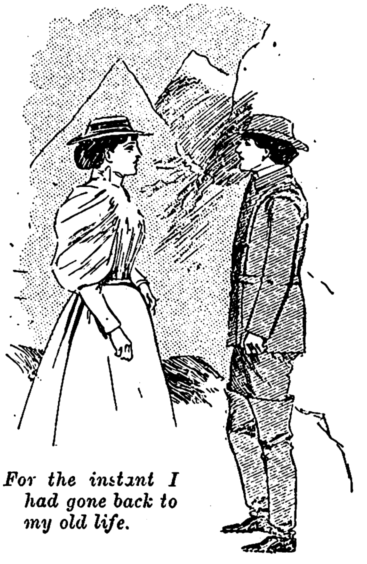
"Will Joyful Star come with me and see the place where her sister and mine is lying waiting to come forth and greet her?"

"Your sister, Vilcaroya?" she said, turning her face up to me so that the starlight shone upon its fairness and lost itself in the lustrous depths of her eyes. "Do you mean your sister only—not your——"

"No," I said, "not my bride, for I have thought upon your words and pondered them deeply, and though they wounded me sorely at first, yet now I see that they were wise and just, like all the other words that Joyful Star has spoken to me. I have learned that lesson, like many others that you have taught me. That bridal of ours is already to me a dream of the long lost past, the vision of a time that is dead and a people that is no more. When Golden Star wakes, if ever she does, I will greet her as a sister and a friend, as one of my own people who has come back to me out of my own times, and she shall help me in the work that I swore with her to do; but that is all, and I will find others of the Blood who shall sit upon the restored throne of my ancestors and be the parents of the generations of Incas that shall come after me."

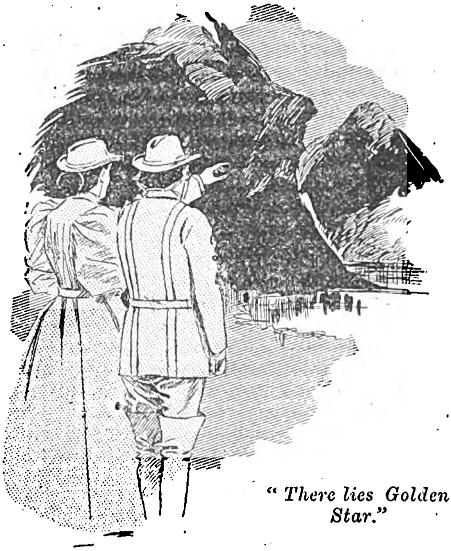
"What do you mean, Vilcaroya?" she said, in a voice that was half angry and half fearful. "Do you mean—no, I cannot say it—for I am sure you do not mean that."

"How could that be," I answered, guessing her meaning. "Is it not you who have taught me the ways and thoughts of the world into which I have come back? No, what I mean is that I am not the only one now alive in whose veins the old blood of the Incas flows. Tupac yonder is the son of the son of the son of that Tupac-Amaru who died torn to pieces in the square of Cuzco because he had dared to raise the rainbow banner in the Land of the Four Regions, and called the Children of the Sun, as I will call them, to revolt against their oppressors. He, more blessed than I, who am his lord, has both wife and child, and if the prophecy is to be fulfilled, and I reign in the City of the Sun, then I will take his firstborn and instruct him in all the lore of our people and the duties of their ruler, and if he proves worthy he shall wear the Llautu after me."


For the instant I had gone back to my old life.

She looked up at me again as I ceased speaking—just one swift bright glance that seemed to pierce to the most secret depths of my soul and read the unuttered thoughts that were hidden there, thoughts which I did not dare to speak even to myself in the loneliest hour of my musings. Then she looked down again, and side by side we walked in silence around the shore of the lake until I stopped in front of a great black cliff that jutted out from the mountain side and hung impending over the dark still waters of the lake. I pointed into the black shadows in which its base was hidden, and said:

"There lies Golden Star, and there I lay beside her through all the long years that were to pass from the night when I pledged my troth with her before the altar of the Sun until this night, when I stand with you, Joyful Star, a new being in a new world, before her resting-place."



"There lies Golden Star."

CHAPTER XIV.

The Living and the Dead.

"Is it really true," she said, standing still, and staring straight before her into the darkness—"is it really true that you who are standing alive and strong here beside me lay there under that great rock for all those years, while ten generations of men and women were born, and lived and died, and the whole world changed again and again; and is the Golden Star lying in there now really the Golden Star you have told me so much of, and I have thought about until she seems to me more like some living friend that I have known and loved than a dead body that has been in the grave for more than three hundred years? Is it really true, Vilcaroya, or have we all only been dreaming some wild dream like that Frankenstein story that I was telling you the other day?"

As she spoke she laid her hand for a moment upon my arm, as though to satisfy herself that I was really made of human flesh and blood, and not a phantom standing beside her in the starlit darkness.

Scarce knowing what I did, I laid my own hand, warm, and strong, and firm, upon hers. For an instant I felt it tremble beneath mine. I would have given all the boundless wealth that I knew was mine for the courage to close upon it a grasp that it could not have escaped if it would. My heart seemed to swell as though it would burst in my breast; my tingling blood ran fire, and wild words rose choking to my lips. Then her hand slipped away from under mine. Once more I saw her eyes shine in the starlight, and then I knew that I had learned the last and greatest lesson that Joyful Star could teach me.

I knew now why to think of Golden Star as my wife and my queen filled me with the same untold horror that I had heard that night thrill in the tones of her who stood beside me; for now I, the son of a lost race and a long past age, loved this daughter of the new time. For good or evil, for hope or despair, I was hers until I went again, and for the last time, into the shadows through which I had already passed, and then—yes, there he was, this tall, stalwart, golden-haired son of her own race and her own time, whose eyes I had seen looking love into hers.

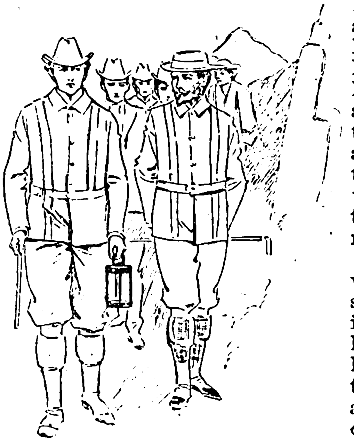
He was coming towards us round the lake with his long, easy swinging strides, this man who was already my friend, and who would one day be the captain of my armies. For one blind moment of madness I thought how completely I had him and the others in my power; of the lonely unknown valley where we stood; of the men who were already my slaves, and who looked upon me as a god. I thought, too, of the dark, deep waters of the lake, and the secrets that they held for me alone. How well they could hide others for me, too! What if Golden Star never awoke, would she not be as well lying there in the peace of her endless sleep as coming back into the world, perhaps to love in vain and to suffer as I was doomed to suffer?

The shadowy forms of the mountains began to waver and reel around me; the stars began to dance in the sky, and a red mist seemed to swim before my eyes. Then through the hoarse dull murmur that was sounding in my ears I heard the sweet, low voice of Joyful Star, saying:

"Ah, Captain Hartness, I suppose you have been wondering what had become of us! I am afraid I have been neglecting my household duties and you have been attending to them for me, but really I could not resist coming here with Vilcaroya. Look, that is where Golden Star is lying—in a cave under this great rock down there where those dark shadows are. Doesn't it look cold and lonely and eerie?"

"Yes," he answered, with a laugh that did not sound to me like his own. "But I don't suppose that matters very much now to her Highness any more than it did to Vilcaroya. But, to descend to less romantic matters, I have come to tell you that the affairs of our temporary household are already in order, supper is ready, and we are all ravenously hungry, and I suppose you are about the same. This mountain air puts an edge on one's appetite like a razor."

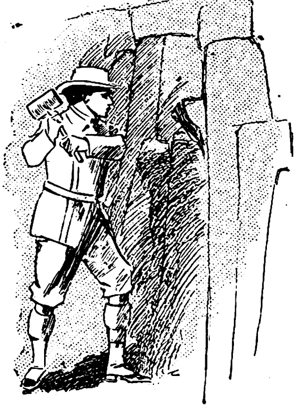
"Supper—yes, of course, I had forgotten all about it, thinking of poor Golden Star lying there all alone in the darkness. Of course, I am desperately hungry now that you remind me of it. Come along, Vilcaroya, I am sure you are hungry, too. Another night alone won't matter much to poor Golden Star after all these years. You can dream of her to-night, as I suppose we all shall, and tomorrow we shall all see her. Oh, how I wonder what she will be really like!"



We took our lanterns and tools and went to the rock.

As Joyful Star said this in a voice that was half sad and half merry, she turned away towards Francis Hartness, and I followed her with some light words on my lips and many heavy thoughts in my heart, and we walked together to the tents, talking of the things that were to be done on the morrow.

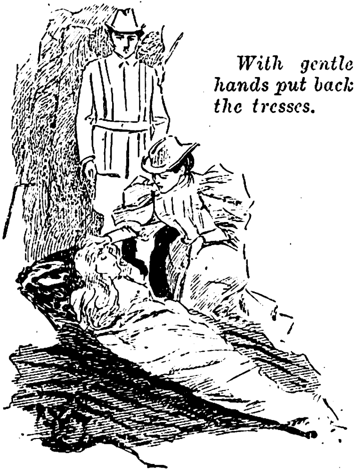
The next morning I was afoot before the stars had begun to pale in the coming dawn. I had not slept for two hours together through the night, yet, waking and sleeping, many dreams had come to me. I had been back to the past among my people, living again that strange old life, with all its light and colour and gaiety, which was now every day becoming more and more like a vision that had been told to me by some other dreamer.



I struck the end of the wedge.

I had talked with Golden Star, seeking to teach her the lesson that my dear instructress of the new time had taught me, and had awakened half mad with the perplexities of my divided love—the love of the past that was dead, and of the present that was alive. I had seen my sister-bride come forth out of her tomb to greet me wrapt in her cere-clothes, with the dust of the grave in her hair and on her face. I had clasped her in my longing arms and kissed the dust from her lips, and while I yet held her in my embrace, her form had grown cold and stiff again. Then, in the agony of my sorrow, I had strained her to my breast, and, under the pressure of my arms, she had crumbled in my grasp and fallen, a little heap of grey bones and dusty garments, at my feet. Once more I had awakened with my gasping cry of horror still sounding in my ears, and then, not daring to seek sleep again, I had risen and gone out to watch for the rest of the night before her grave under the rock. There they found me when they came from the camp at daybreak. I went back with them, and our hasty morning meal was eaten and drunk almost in silence, for we were all too busy with our thoughts to have leisure for conversation, and my friends, knowing how much that day's work must mean to me, respected my unspoken feelings, and left me to the silent company of my own hopes and fears.

Breakfast over, we took our lanterns and tools and went to the rock, followed by Tupac, and two of my men carrying the coffin-like case in which Golden Star's body was to be laid. Under the rock was a long heap of loose stones which the Professor had wisely piled up in front of the upright courses of masonry through which he had broken into my resting place. He scanned them eagerly to see if they had been disturbed since his visit, and told us that they had not. Then I bade Tupac and the men clear them away, which they speedily did, laying bare the courses of stone behind them, still standing as the Professor had re-built them after taking out my body.



With gentle hands put back the tresses.

A few minutes' more work opened a passage large enough for a man to walk in stooping. As if by common instinct they all stepped aside and looked at me. I saw what they meant, and, turning the light of my lantern into the entrance, I walked back, a living man, into the grave where I had lain dead while ten generations of men had lived and died. I saw the place were I had lain, for a few mouldering scraps and shreds of cloth and furs still lay where my bed had been. Then I flashed my lantern round the walls of the cavern, and on the side along which my own couch had been spread by Anda-Huillac and his brother priests I found what they had told me to seek while I was preparing to fulfil the oath that I had sworn with Golden Star.

It was a wedge of stone fitted in to a crevice in the wall and left rough and jagged at its outer end, so that one who did not know its true purpose would have taken it to be nothing more than a natural projection in the rough side of the cavern.

With a mallet that I had brought with me I struck the end of the wedge softly above and below until it was loosened in its socket. Then standing to one side I struck it harder. It dropped from its place, and the same instant a part of the cavern wall swayed outwards, and fell with a dull crash across the floor.

For a moment I stood breathless and motionless on the threshold of Golden Star's grave. Then, with trembling hand, I turned the light of my lantern into the inner chamber, and as the dust that the falling stone had raised fell slowly back to the ground I saw through the particles dancing in the lantern rays the dim outline of a human form lying on a couch of skins. Still not daring to set a foot within the sacred precincts, I stood in the doorway and let the light fall full upon the figure. A glance showed me that so far all was well. No profaning hand had disturbed the peace and sanctity of her long slumber. She lay there as perfect in form and feature as she had lain beside me that night in the little chamber in the Sanctuary.

Then I thought of Joyful Star. Hers should be the first eyes after mine to look upon that dead loveliness. So I turned and went out to where they were all standing round the outer entrance, and, taking no notice of the others, replying nothing to their half-whispered questions, I went to Ruth and, holding out my hand for her, said:

"Come Joyful Star and see the sister that the Lord of Life made long ago in the image that you now wear."

She said nothing, but with a look of wondering question put her hand into mine and I turned to lead her to the entrance.

Djama with a sudden exclamation took a step forward as though he would stop her, but Francis Hartness put his hand on his shoulder saying:

"I think you had better let them go alone. There is no fear for your sister with all of us here so near, and if what Vilcaroya says is true, why should she not see her first?"

Djama drew back and we went in unchecked. I went into the inner chamber, helping Ruth over the fallen stone, and then I flashed my light on Golden Star's face and said:

"Did I not tell you truly that the Lord of Life made her in the same image as yours?"

I heard her utter a little gasping cry of wonder, and then saw her slip forward on to her knees beside Golden Star's pillow and as the light fell upon the two faces, the living and the dead, the likeness between them was so perfect, save for the lustrous blackness of Joyful Star's hair and the golden gleam of the tresses that framed my dead love's face, that they seemed to me as sisters, one watching over the slumbers of the other.

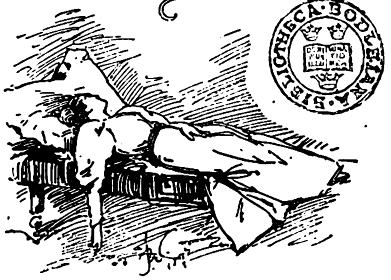
"It is more than wonderful and it is more than chance!" said Joyful Star, in a tone that was almost a whisper and turning towards me her white face and the eyes into which the loving tears of pity were already springing. "Why did you not tell me of this before, Vilcaroya?"

"Because," I said, "the arts of the priests might not have done for her what they did for me, and I might have found here that which your eyes should never have looked upon. But now, is she not beautiful, even as you are?"

The bright blood came swiftly back into her cheeks as I said this, and, without answering me, she stooped, and with gentle hands put back the tresses from Golden Star's forehead, and, bending over her, laid her warm sweet lips on the cold smooth brow that I had last seen crowned with the marriage garland in our bridal chamber in the Sanctuary.

(*To be continued.*)

The Strange Experience of the General's Wife



BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

I AM a physician, and among my patients number the wife of a deceased army officer. The General's wife was a case of nervous debility. She had, so to speak, a genius for nervousness; her body, like her soul, vibrated at a touch, like a delicate stringed instrument under a skilled master's hand. She was an excellent wife, and she adored a second husband, whom she married soon after the death of the General, whose title the world continued to give her.

She worshipped the last husband, but unfortunately, the unworthy scamp—much younger than his wife—in no way deserved the self-sacrificing tenderness and the loving solicitude with which she treated him. Whenever and wherever an inducement offered, he stole away from their elegant home, and spent the night as well as his wife's money in dissipation.

The wife's sorrow and despair were boundless, all the more as the frivolous youth, who had every reason to avoid an open rupture, knew how to preserve appearances with an inexhaustible store of evasions and excuses. He lied and cheated with the thorough adroitness and untiring attention of a man to whom fraud and artifice yielded a yearly income of many thousands.

But she put his different statements together, and discovered little contradictions—deficiencies. Then the poor woman shed bitter tears and sobbed in heartbreaking fashion, and became so miserable that she was not ashamed, under the circumstances, to consult me, her family physician and trusted adviser. At first I strove to calm her in the usual way, by lying.

But, alas! I soon saw these innocent expedients were not sufficient. So the General's wife often sat for hours in my study, crying and wringing her hands with incessant grief. One day she sat on the sofa, her head buried in her hands, groaning and moaning in agony of soul. Without design beyond trying to sooth her, I smoothed her forehead several times with my hand, and saw, to my great surprise, the sobbing woman become quiet, involuntarily let her hands fall to her side, begin to breathe regularly, and soon fall into a deep sleep.

My astonishment merged into joy, for the poor woman with her grief had become a little troublesome. Therefore, I ordered my servant to roll the sofa on which she slumbered into the next room. After a while I awakened her by blowing in her face, and told her she had slept.

"Ah!" she answered; "that has done me a world of good. I feel, indeed, that you are right, doctor. Probably I have been foolish to suspect my good husband."

She gratefully pressed my hand, and departed, hopefully smiling.

About a month afterwards, the carriage of the General's wife stopped again before my door, and the poor wife sat with weeping eyes in my study. Renewed groans, renewed tears. I told her to go into the little room. I made the same passes lightly over her brow, as on the former occasion, and she slept again in a moment. Again she awoke in a calmer state, and hastened to her husband. She repeated her calls quite frequently.

One day the General's wife came to me unusually agitated, and confessed with tears that her husband had not come home the previous night. My office hours were nearly over; my waiting-room was thronged. I gently led her into the little room, put her to sleep as usual, locked the door, and went back to my studies. My servant brought an urgent dispatch. A Brazilian prince was dangerously ill; a difficult surgical operation must be performed, and they honoured me with a request that I should perform it. The steamship would leave Bordeaux next morning. To catch the night train I must start at once. I excused myself to my patients. I quickly packed all the necessary instruments and books, bought a ticket, and soon left Paris far behind.

The train was late; the steamer was waiting for us. I was scarcely on deck before the signal for departure was sounded, and we were moving. I went at once to my cabin, unpacked my scientific works, and lost myself in reading. I thought of the great honour fallen to my share, and alternated between hope and fear as to the success of the operation. Wearied with the day's excitement, I went early to sleep, and did not wake till morning. I went on deck. The captain approached me.

"We seem to have come a good way, captain?"

"Four hundred miles," was his reply.

"And where do you intend to stop on the way?"

"Nowhere. We go directly to Rio de Janeiro. A thirty-six days' voyage lies before us." A steamer went much slower in those days than now.

"Thirty-six days!" I cried mechanically. "No trifle that, Captain; a long time—a very, very long time indeed!"

I looked thoughtfully at the play of the waves. A dark presentiment suddenly troubled me. It seemed to me as if I had forgotten something. But what could I have forgotten? What—what had slipped my mind? Suddenly I groaned aloud. Like lightning it had flashed through my head. The General's wife—the General's wife in a complete catalepsy; the General's wife locked in the little room which my people never entered, the key of which I carried with me!

"Captain," I cried, lifting my hands imploringly, "I must instantly send a telegram!"

The Captain took two swift steps sideways and fixed his eyes on me in a singular way. He evidently believed that I had suddenly gone crazy.

"I must—I *must* telegraph, Captain," I insisted. "I have forgotten the General's wife, Captain; the General's wife who is asleep. Do you hear, Captain? She is asleep!"

"What do you mean?" cried the Captain impatiently. "If you left her asleep she must have wakened by this time!" He turned his back, laughing hoarsely, and ordered two sailors not to lose sight of me.

I need not say what a terrible day I passed. Sleeping or waking, I always saw the dreadful picture of the poor woman sunk in a sleep lying on the sofa—on the sofa from which she could never rise.

In what a state I found myself on the thirty-sixth day it would not be easy for you to imagine. At last Rio de Janeiro was in sight. I threw myself into a boat, sprang ashore, and ran to the telegraph office. "*Break open door of small room; wake up the General's wife!*"

* * * * *

When the dissipated husband of the General's wife discovered that she, too, had been out all night, he gave the matter no more thought than to use the favourable opportunity for another carousal.

"Is madame home yet?" he nonchalantly asked the porter, as he returned the second morning.

"No, sir," replied the porter.

The affair did not trouble him, but it began to appear strange

The third day went by, the fourth came, and no sign of the General's wife. Her husband became uneasy. He sent to her relatives in the country. They had not seen her for years. The young man's disquiet increased from hour to hour. The fifth day he informed the police. Their search was vain. It was found that she had been to me that day, but they could go no farther. Hundreds of patients daily went in and out of my office, in at one door and out of another, which opened directly on the stairs.

My people could not remember about her, the police could not think of searching my rooms, neither did it occur to my servant to force open the small room, since I frequently locked it when I wanted to guard some valuable object, or interesting study. So the disappearance of the General's wife remained an insoluble mystery.

One believes what one wishes. So, when four days more passed, the husband was convinced his wife never would return. He said to himself, with a certain painful satisfaction: "The poor thing has killed herself! From love of me, no doubt!"

According to the marriage contract the wife's wealth now belonged to him. A skilful lawyer at once arranged everything. The young widower inaugurated his monarchy by making such alterations in the stately old house as his own somewhat loud taste dictated. His wife's boudoir was changed to a smoking-room. In place of the dining-room a museum of weapons appeared. The small blue parlour served as a billiard-room. The carriage in which the General's wife used to drive was sold and replaced by a dog-cart. She had prided herself on simple, unostentatious livery; her widower dressed his servants in red, gold-embroidered uniform.

One evening my servant was called to the door by a stout stranger suffering from dropsy, who wanted me to cure him. Just as he was about to say that I had not been at home for over a month, a messenger ran up the steps, and handed him a telegram. My servant read it, turned pale, and cried:

"Quick, quick! Break open the door of the little room!"

The dropsical man was so frightened at the outcry that he fell in a swoon. Without troubling himself about him, my servant ran through the study, put his shoulder to the door of the inner room, and burst it in.

On the sofa lay the General's wife, covered with a thick layer of dust. Under the combined influence of tears, rice-powder, and dust, her face, never pretty, had gained the look of a caricature. She was an awful sight. My servant was familiar with the mysteries of catalepsy, so he wasted no time in blowing strongly in her face. She was not dead, but, of course, much emaciated. At last she opened her eyes, and made a motion as if she would have dried her tears.

"Dear doctor," said she, in a weak voice, "I feel a little encouraged. I believe I have wronged my husband. He has really passed the night at the club. I will hasten to him."

She arose and went to the door. My servant was so excited that no word passed his lips. She passed through the study. When the dropsical patient, who had just recovered consciousness, caught sight of her, he cried in horror: "Is this the state in which patients come out of the private room?" and fled as fast as he could.

The house of the lady was not far from mine. She hurried home. At the door she stopped in wonder. Was she awake? This could not possibly be her plain house. The vestibule was decorated with gay frescoes, a confusion of glaring escutcheons and bizarre flowers. Speechless with amazement she went upstairs, intending to pass through the small blue parlour to her boudoir.

There was neither little blue parlour nor boudoir. In one was a billiard table; in the other a collection of pipes!

The General's wife sank into a chair to collect her confused thoughts.

Suddenly she rose; she could hear voices near by. Laughter and singing met her ear. She hurried to a *portière*, quickly and resolutely lifted it. Horrible! Her husband sat with some ladies at a richly spread table.

The servant at a glimpse of the General's wife, who seemed to have risen from her grave, let plate and dish fall. The women fled with frightful shrieks, while the supposed widower, who had drank a little more than necessary, flung himself on his knees, and, deathly pale, stammered:

"It is her spirit! Forgive me!"

"Leave the house!" cried the General's wife. "Servants, know your true mistress, and chase this unworthy wretch from the house!"

The servants, who from fear had kept aloof, obeyed her command.

As the sorely troubled woman with great satisfaction watched them execute her order, she saw my servant who had followed her unobserved.

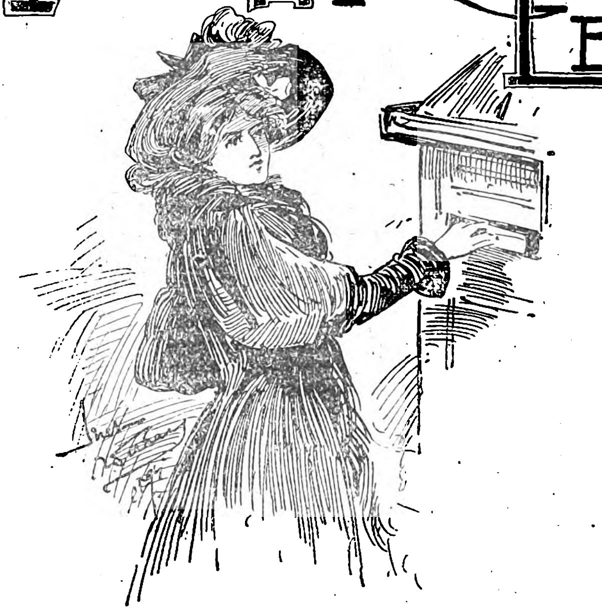
"What has happened?" she asked.

"Madame," my servant replied, "you have slept for five weeks."

"O, fool that I have been!" she cried, with a deep groan. "When one has slept for so long a period one need never wake!"

MARY BRYAN.

A THREATENING LETTER



I was crossing the barrack-yard one chilly winter's night last year, on my return from a dull and formal dinner party at our Colonel's, when I met an orderly bearing a telegram.

"For you, Captain; I was just bringing it to the Colonel's."

I tore open the buff envelope and read this message:

"Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin.
"Come at once; I am dying.
"Herbert Stafford."

What should I do? I must get the Colonel's permission to start by the morning train, so I recrossed the yard, leapt into a hansom and drove back. I was just in time. The last guest lingered on the threshold. Having shown my chief the telegram, my request was immediately granted.

Herbert Stafford and I were old friends and fellow officers. He and his brother were orphans, both very wealthy and deeply attached to one another. Herbert, not being of age, according to the terms of his father's will, until he was twenty-seven, was still under the guardianship of his brother Theodore, a quiet, steady-going gentleman, much absorbed in his banking business, and twenty years older than Herbert.

Everyone was surprised when his approaching marriage was announced, but Herbert was delighted.

After the wedding he returned in ecstasies.

"The bride was most beautiful," he said, "so ingenuous, so sweet, and gentle! His brother was indeed the most fortunate of men."

"But he is twenty years older than she is," I observed.

"What does that matter? They adore one another."

Shortly afterwards he went on a visit to the newly-married pair in Wicklow, where they had taken a lovely place for the summer. I passed a fortnight there with them also, and had thus an opportunity of studying Laura Stafford.

She was certainly a lovely woman, but with a portentous kind of beauty, a certain grace of movement and fascination of manner which reminded me of Aspasia of yore, and I perfectly understand how, for her sake, the middle-aged banker had forgotten his scripts and bonds, his loans and premiums. But within that classic form dwelt a soul of fire, of passion ungovernable, else I was misled by outward signs and tokens—the quivering lip, the sudden flashes of light in the large dark eyes, the quick flush which now and then suffused the pallid countenance.

I could not help observing Herbert's undisguised admiration for his brother's wife, and one day I ventured to remonstrate with him; but he resented my interference hotly.

"How dare you!" he said. "How dare you! Do you for one moment imagine that our intimate friendship gives you the right?" and he turned on his heel and left me.

Poor Herbert! If he had a fault it was that he was too tender-hearted, too sympathetic, too easily led.

When I reached the Shelbourne Hotel a hospital nurse met me on the threshold of my friend's room.

"How is he?" I whispered.

"Tranquil now, but he has been asking for you all night long."

He lay with his face towards me, the eyes closed, the lips slightly apart, and, save for the gentle rise and fall of the bed-covering, one would have thought him dead.

The middle-aged banker.

I sat down beside him, and placed my hand on his. He opened his eyes, smiled sadly, and muttered:

"Dick!"

"Herbert!"

Then the eyes closed, and I thought the spirit had faded; but the nurse administered a few drops of brandy, and the fast-ebbing strength returned momentarily, and he motioned the woman to leave the room.

When the door closed behind her, I looked at him earnestly, questioningly.

"Herbert, what is the matter? What is this?" and I touched the blood-stained bandage on his bosom.

"Dick, I tried to kill myself!"

"Good Heavens! But why?"

"Because I was not fit to live—I was worse than Cain, aye, ten thousand times worse than Cain."

I understood.

"Laura!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Laura," he said faintly.

"The old story, Herbert?"

"No, Dick, not quite. In the old story it is the woman who weeps—in this case that order of things is reversed."

"And your brother?"

"He knows all now—Ah, me! he knows all—she wrote and told him—last night—but until he got that letter he knew nothing. Do not think I did not suffer before I came to this? I did—horribly, horribly. I was not fit to live. A little more brandy. Thanks, old man. I want to tell you all before I go."

He paused a moment to take a sip from the flask I had handed to him. The spirit soon revived his strength, and he was able to continue.

"I tried to free myself from the state of bondage in which I lived. My brother was exceedingly anxious that I should marry, and proposed several matches. About six weeks ago I met a girl, loved her, and wished to make her my wife, but—but it was not to be.

"Laura, from the moment that my engagement was announced, became a changed being. She feigned approval in public and loaded my affianced wife with caresses and gifts, whilst in private she treated me to scenes of violent abuse, wild threats and outbursts of fury, and from that hour we entered on a mortal struggle.

"Yesterday evening she came to my room. My brother had been hurriedly called away to Scotland, and she was about to follow him, so she came to play her last card. First she flung herself at my feet, wept hysterically, invoked the memory of our past love, and all that sort of thing; but I had learned what her real nature was, so all her arts and graces were unavailing.

"Then she became a perfect fury, threatened to kill me, flung the most horrible accusations in my face, and, drawing a sealed envelope from her pocket, she directed my attention to the fact that it was addressed to my brother.

"'Here!' she said, with a melodramatic air, 'here is the admission of our intrigue. You either break off this marriage and return to me, or I post this letter to your brother, and follow it up immediately with a verbal confession.'

"'Actress!' I cried tauntingly.

"She looked at me, said nothing, and went out. But she had frightened me, and I rushed to the window and watched her cross the street. She stopped when she reached the letter-box, looked up, waved the letter so that I might see what she was doing, and dropped it into the pillar."

The sad story was told, but the exertion was too much for the poor fellow, he became incoherent, then unconscious, and died just before midnight.

* * * * *

Theodore Stafford and his wife attended the funeral. I watched them as they stood by the grave side. He, ever gentle and considerate, seemed to suffer in seeing her tears—for she wept bitterly—and tried to comfort her, and I at once understood from his demeanour that the posting of that letter had been—a farce.

* * * * *

The envelope had merely contained a blank sheet of paper.

B. S. K.

FIVE-GUINEA PICTURES GOING A-BEGGING.

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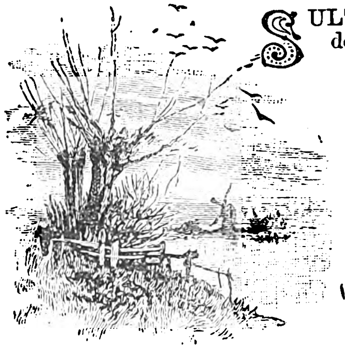
A MASTER AT CHESS.



SULTAN MURAD was devoted to the game of chess. To say, without flattery, that he was a good player, is to say that he was a man of considerable intellectual power. But Sultan Murad in his play had two failings; he liked to have an adequate stake on the issue of the game, and he could very ill brook defeat.

The Grand Vizier heard this proposal to stake his daughter, his favourite child, with dismay; but he knew his imperial master too well to venture a refusal.

These weaknesses are always trying, but, in the case of so powerful and absolute a monarch, they rendered the game one of exceeding danger. To lose pretty constantly meant ruin; to win too often might easily mean death. Under these circumstances it became difficult for his Majesty to find an adversary, and an invitation to contest came to have as fatal a significance, and to be as much dreaded, and, if possible, avoided, as the post of Grand Vizier had been in the reign of Selim the Grim.

So many had lost all they possessed, and some their lives into the bargain, that every high officer of state shunned, as far as possible, the dangerous honour of facing his master across a chess-board. Naturally, no official could with more difficulty escape the ordeal than the Grand Vizier himself; and, indeed, it was owing principally to this cause that so many occupants of this high post had rapidly succeeded one another during the reign of Sultan Murad.

It so happened that the present Grand Vizier was as keen an enthusiast for the game as the Sultan himself. This had been probably his chief recommendation for the office; and, being a born gambler, and of a constitutionally bold and reckless nature, he was always ready to play, counting neither the cost nor the hazard.

He played on with varying fortune, but generally losing, until he had staked and lost everything he possessed, or could scrape together.

At length, one afternoon, on the Sultan saying to him: "Well, Grand Vizier, and what dost thou venture on this new game?" he answered ruefully: "My Padishah, except the garments in which I stand before thee, and which are thine already, there is, of a truth, no one thing I possessed that I have not staked and lost, and only by the bounty of thy Majesty shall I and Fatima, my daughter and only child, find bread or shelter, so great is the skill of your majesty at this game."

"Come, Vizier," said Murad, "if it be so bad with thee as that, I will tell thee what thou shalt do. Thou shalt on thy part stake thy daughter, and I on my part will stake the loveliest *odalisque* in my harem, and ten thousand gold pieces to boot, and we will play yet another game."

Therefore they played, and he lost. Then the unhappy father, in the bitterness of his heart, said: "Oh, Sultan, I have my head only, and that is at thy mercy, but if thou wilt on thy part stake my daughter, whom thou hast just won, I will wager my head against her!"

"Vizier," said Murad gravely, "the stakes are hardly even, but if thou wishest it, so shall it be."

And once more they played, and again the Vizier lost.

Then Murad laughed, and said: "Be not alarmed; I give thee thy last stake, for thou hast never flinched, but hast ever played boldly and well; only this understand, we have played our last game, and thou holdest thy office only until I appoint another in thy place."

After this final defeat of his courageous and indomitable Grand Vizier, Murad was hard put to it to find any suitable opponent to face him at the chess-board. All men shirked the dangerous honour, and the unhappy Vizier, commanded to undertake the duty, found it difficult to guess whether victory or defeat might prove more perilous.

At length the Sultan bethought him of a plan which seemed to promise more diversion than could be obtained from encountering those timorous and unwilling adversaries. He caused it to be proclaimed that any man might challenge his Majesty to a game of chess, the conditions being that the challenger staked his own head against the office of Grand Vizier.

To such lengths will the cupidity and self-confidence of many men carry them, that numbers were found ready to face the Sultan on these terms; but whether Murad's skill was invincible, or whether his opponents were frightened and unnerved by the risk they ran, at any rate each succeeding aspirant lost his head instead of attaining the object of his ambition—the coveted position of Grand Vizier.

At the time of issuing the proclamation, there lived in Adrianople a family consisting of three persons—father, mother, and one son. The latter was a young man of pleasing manners, a good presence, and of remarkable energy and intellectual capacity.

The news of the Sultan's offer had reached this retired and secluded family, and the son, who had long been a devoted student of the game, had just announced to his father and mother his determination to proceed to the capital and put his life on the hazard of the event.

To this both father and mother vehemently and very naturally objected, and tried by every argument they could think of to dissuade him, but the young man would not be gainsaid, and at length he set out on his dangerous adventure.

When Osman was ushered into the presence of the Sultan, and the object of his coming explained, Murad himself felt some regret that so handsome and intelligent a youth should risk his life in a combat apparently so unequal.

After regarding him in silence a few moments, he asked him: "Dost thou understand what are the conditions of the game we are about to play?"

"If I have been correctly informed, sire," said Osman, "the conditions are these: if I win, your Majesty will appoint me your Grand Vizier; if I lose, my life is the forfeit."

"And dost thou still wish to play on these terms?" asked Murad.

"I have," answered Osman, "travelled far to seek that honour."

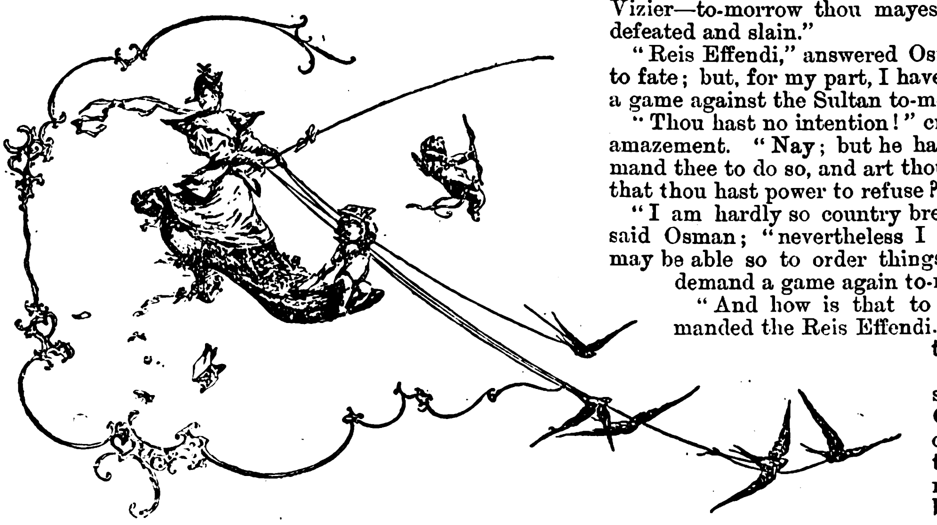
"But what can that fatal honour avail thee?" asked Murad, "or what benefit can accrue to thee if thou must die?"

"Hope sustains the soul," said Osman, "and makes me willing to risk life for an adequate reward."

"How long hast thou played chess?" demanded the Sultan.

"My father taught me as a boy," answered Osman, "and all my life I have loved and studied it."

"Very good," said Murad; "then at thy desire this day shalt thou play for thy life."



But first, by order of the Sultan, a sumptuous repast was served, and at his invitation Osman partook of it with him. Then, after a period of rest during the midday heat, the chessmen were brought out, and, amid a circle of high dignitaries and officials of the palace, the youthful stranger faced his imperial lord and essayed the difficult, and, as it appeared to all present, the foolhardy task of checkmating him.

Only five moves had been made, during breathless silence, when Osman calmly pronounced the word "Checkmate," and on inspection the fact was clearly established.

All were astonished. And the Sultan, amazed and almost stupefied, was filled with fury.

"What," cried he, "beaten, and in five moves, by a mere boy! What is the meaning of this? Say, what demon hath helped thee, or by what power of enchantment has thou been able to accomplish the feat?"

"Sire," replied Osman, "this opening of the game is a new one. Being completely unexpected, it has given me for this time the victory which I can never hope again to attain over so great and experienced a player as your Majesty."

These words somewhat mollified the Sultan, and, after having sat silent for a few minutes, his wrath being partly appeased, he said: "By whatever means the victory has incontestably been gained, and since thou must have paid thy forfeit hadst thou lost, Allah forbid that thou shouldst fail to receive the reward that I have promised."

He thereupon commanded that Osman should be arrayed in the gorgeous robes of the office, and, summoning all the officers and high dignitaries to the Hall of the Throne, he presented Osman to them as Grand Vizier.

Then, as he dismissed him, he said, significantly:

"Grand Vizier, to-morrow we will play again."

In the evening Osman sat in the official palace of the Grand Vizier, and the Reis Effendi, an old friend of his father, by his invitation, sat at meat with him, and they discussed what had passed and what was to be apprehended.

"Osman," said the Reis Effendi, "thou hast played a bold game and won it, yet I know too well the character and disposition of Murad to be able sincerely to congratulate thee. To-day thou art victorious and Grand Vizier—to-morrow thou mayest only too probably be defeated and slain."

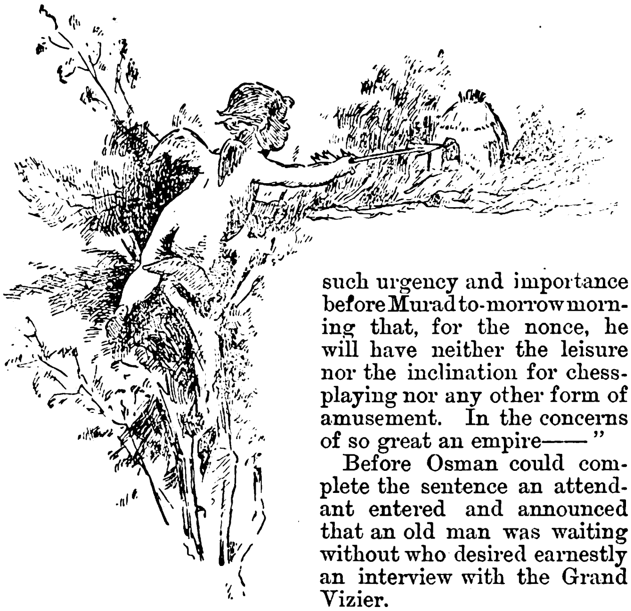
"Reis Effendi," answered Osman, "each must yield to fate; but, for my part, I have no intention of playing a game against the Sultan to-morrow."

"Thou hast no intention!" cried the Reis Effendi, in amazement. "Nay; but he has the intention to command thee to do so, and art thou so simple as to suppose that thou hast power to refuse?"

"I am hardly so country bred as to suppose that," said Osman; "nevertheless I venture to hope that I may be able so to order things that Murad shall not demand a game again to-morrow."

"And how is that to be accomplished?" demanded the Reis Effendi. "What dark scheme is this thou hast in hand?"

"At present I have no scheme completed," said Osman, "but only the outline or idea of the tactics which must be resorted to. My aim must be to set some affair of



such urgency and importance before Murad to-morrow morning that, for the nonce, he will have neither the leisure nor the inclination for chess-playing nor any other form of amusement. In the concerns of so great an empire—— "

Before Osman could complete the sentence an attendant entered and announced that an old man was waiting without who desired earnestly an interview with the Grand Vizier.

"It is late," said Osman, "but if he be an old man, doubtless he must have an adequate reason for coming at this hour. Let him enter."

When the applicant entered the apartment, what was Osman's astonishment to behold in him no other than his own father. After having been warmly welcomed by both Osman and the Reis Effendi, the old man was pressed to say how it came to pass that he had undertaken so long a journey.

"My son," he replied, "after thy departure neither thy mother nor, sooth to say, myself either, could control the anxiety and apprehension we suffered on thine account. Therefore, having sold a ring—the last remaining valuable in our possession—in order to provide the small fund necessary for my journey, I followed thee to learn the result of thy rash attempt. Happily, it appears that thou hast won and not lost the game, yet whether thou art not still in imminent peril is much to be doubted."

"That thy son is even now in extreme peril of his life there can be no question," said the Reis Effendi. "To-morrow he must again play, unless, indeed, he can manage to divert the Sultan's attention and alter his declared intention. But in what way such a diversion is to be accomplished I cannot imagine."

"If that be the case," said the old man, "it is indeed well that I undertook the journey hither, for I bring intelligence which may now stand us in good stead. On my way I learnt by accident of a conspiracy that appears to be hatching in Roumelia, the early knowledge of which may prove of great value to the Sultan and his advisers."

"Thou art indeed fortunate," said the Reis Effendi, "to be in the possession of that information. His Majesty will doubtless be alarmed, and his attention engrossed by the details of such a project."

When, next morning, Osman, in his capacity as Grand Vizier, was closeted with Murad, he hastened to impart to him the intelligence he had received concerning the projected rising, and the design of the rebels to march upon the capital.

On hearing this account, Murad, seized with panic, talked of raising a large army, and at once marching upon the disaffected province.

Osman, however, said calmly: "If your Majesty will permit me to express my opinion, I should say, let no man know of this conspiracy, for even the rumour of insurrection is apt to unsettle men's minds, and spread the infection of revolt. The plan of the conspirators at present is secret; let it never be declared; crush it in the bud! At this stage a very small force will suffice, even as the beginning of a fire, which, neglected, would waste a city, may be quenched with the contents of a bucket. Let me, your Majesty, take five hundred Janissaries with me, proceed with all speed to Adrianople, and two hours after my arrival, the leaders of the plot will be executed, and the movement will be at an end."

The Sultan approved this reasoning and the advice given him by his new Grand Vizier, and bade him start at once on the mission he had proposed.

Within an hour, the Grand Vizier, with his escort of five hundred men, left the capital; Osman, as he parted with his friend, the Reis Effendi, observing simply: "The game of chess is adjourned."

The Grand Vizier, on reaching Adrianople, proceeded immediately to the house of the Governor of Roumelia, and had him executed on the spot. Having also put to death several of his creatures and officials who had been guilty of the grossest tyranny and extortion, and also those who had been in any way implicated in the projected rising, he replaced, to the great joy of all, his father in his former position of Governor of Roumelia, and hastened back to report to his Majesty that the province was now perfectly contented and loyal.

The Sultan was delighted with the promptitude and energy of his new Grand Vizier. He began from this time to rely on his judgment and to take his advice on every occasion, and for a time Osman ruled the empire with unquestioned authority and conspicuous success. Murad often commanded the presence of his Grand Vizier at the chessboard; but the stakes to be played for were always fixed within the bounds of reason and moderation, and whether the game were lost or won—and Osman was too prudent often to win—the terrible claws of the imperial tiger remained sheathed in velvet.

This happy state of affairs continued some time, and might perhaps have continued indefinitely had not the Bostanji Bashi, in revenge for some imaginary slight or unintentional discourtesy on the part of the Grand Vizar, contrived his downfall. This was a task not difficult to be achieved with a master such as Murad. A few words alluding to "the policy and aims of our new ruler," which he was allowed to overhear, excited the jealousy and suspicion of the Sultan. And with him the interval between jealousy and suspicion, and the determination to rid himself of the object of them, was short indeed. He determined at once that Osman should play again for his head, and that this time he should lose.

On the same afternoon he took occasion, on winning a game, to address Osman as follows: "My good Grand Vizier, I notice that in these little friendly contests of ours you seldom win. Now, I like not to play with one who puts not out his full strength."

With a mocking smile he continued: "Possibly the stakes are now too trivial to make it worth while for you to exert your full powers. This must be remedied. I on my part will stake one of my daughters; you shall, if you win, have her to wife, and with her a dowry of two hundred purses of gold. And ou on your side must, I suppose, play for the stake you played for at first, and then, you remember, you won in five moves, and easily enough."

The afternoon of the next day was fixed as the time appointed for the playing of this fateful game. During the interval Osman pondered deeply on the best course to pursue in the predicament in which he now found himself. He was in little doubt that, even though he should win this game, another equally momentous would follow, and that nothing could avail to keep his head on his shoulders if Murad had, as he shrewdly suspected, determined to get rid of him.

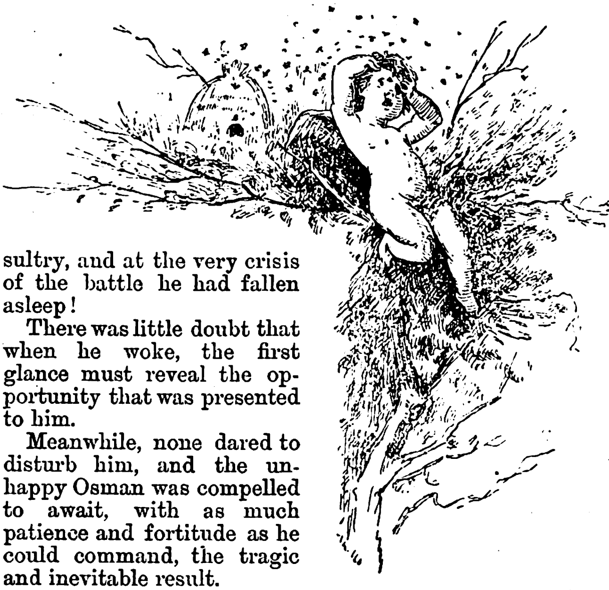
Yet it was clear that, under these circumstances, to win would probably be less fatal than to lose; it might for a short time delay, if it could not avert, the end that seemed inevitable. Therefore when, on the following afternoon, the Grand Vizier faced the Sultan at the chess-board, each of these good players sat down determined to win if he possibly could manage it.

They were not alone. A large number of the great officers and high officials of the state and the palace sat watching the game which might so suddenly terminate the brief and brilliant career of one of the players. Every move was followed with the keenest interest. The game was fought with great skill and indomitable patience by both combatants. It lasted long, and the chances of victory and defeat still held an even balance.

It was the Grand Vizier's turn. He moved his piece, when suddenly it flashed upon him that the move was a mistaken one. Virtually it sealed his fate. Unless the Sultan should by some extraordinary obtuseness overlook the opportunity afforded him, three moves would at once terminate the game and cut short the life of Osman. He dared not raise his eyes from the board lest his glance should involuntarily betray to the Sultan his consciousness of the blunder he had committed.

For some time the whole assembly sat silent and motionless. The Sultan made no move. What could be the cause of his delay? Was he gloating over the assurance of victory, and purposely prolonging the anxiety and apprehension of his victim, or could it be possible that he had really failed to observe the opportunity provided for him, and was still considering, undecided, his next move?

The pause continued so long that Osman ventured at length to raise his eyes to his adversary. Rather than such suspense it would be preferable to know the worst. As he looked up a strange sight met his gaze. The Sultan sat with his head bent down; the afternoon was sultry, and at the very crisis of the battle he had fallen asleep!



There was little doubt that when he woke, the first glance must reveal the opportunity that was presented to him.

Meanwhile, none dared to disturb him, and the unhappy Osman was compelled to await, with as much patience and fortitude as he could command, the tragic and inevitable result.

No man in that large assembly either spoke or stirred. With calm, unruffled demeanour, truly Oriental, they sat silent and watchful till the Sultan should wake and deign to continue the game, which his sleep had so suddenly interrupted. Silence reigned in the court without no less than within the hall itself.

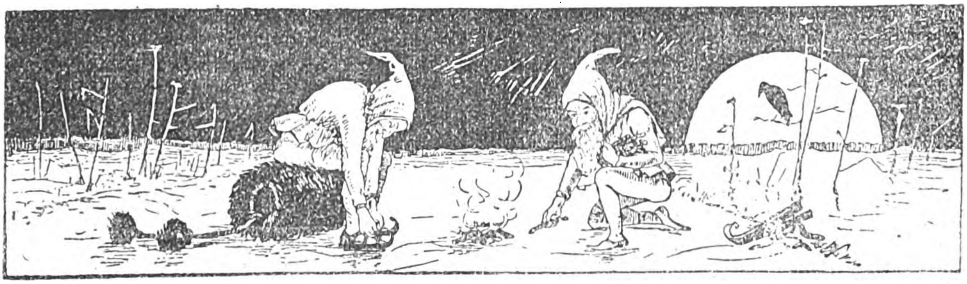
At length the call to prayer of the muezzin on the mosque resounded through the heavy air. "Come to prayer, come to prayer, God is most great, God is most great. There is no God but God." Still the Sultan slept, and no one in that bejewelled crowd dared to disturb his slumber.

At last an incident that none could have foreseen occurred to break the silence. One of the soldiers stationed at the door followed unconsciously the example set him by his imperial master, and fell asleep, and suddenly his scimitar, falling from his relaxing grasp, fell clanging on to the marble steps.

All looked up with amazement; all excepting Murad.

Then Osman rose and touched the Sultan lightly on the shoulder, and he fell forward with a crash among the chessmen—for he was dead!

H. N. Crellin.



WHO WAS THE THIRTEENTH GUEST?

A STRANGE STORY OF SUPERSTITION.

"It is extremely annoying," said Vernon, looking at his watch. "It is always disagreeable to a host to have a dinner delayed by one of the guests' tardiness, but in this instance it is particularly so."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because," he replied, "the number of guests is exactly fourteen, and if Sedley does not come we shall be obliged to sit at table with that most ill-omened of numbers—thirteen."

"But you surely do not believe in that old woman's superstition, do you?" cried Sinclair.

His remark jarred upon me. I am myself not of a superstitious way of thinking, but it does not follow from this that I have the right to jeer at the superstitions of others. I would not knowingly wound the feelings of an African negro by making light of his fetish. But Sinclair is not of that state of mind. A wit, a scoffer, a brilliant talker—I have noticed that these qualities may be frequently associated with an utter disregard for the feelings of others.

Vernon frowned. "Whether I believe in it or not," said he, "is not of so much importance as whether any of my guests do. I would not be willing that any man should sit at my table as one of thirteen if he thought it an ill omen. It would spoil his dinner, if it would do nothing worse. But I have no hesitation in saying that I *am* affected by what you are pleased to call an old woman's superstition—I am, in fact, so powerfully affected by it that I would not sit at table with thirteen for any consideration."

"Would nothing induce you to do so?" asked Sinclair, with what I considered ill-timed banter.

"Nothing," said Vernon firmly; and growing somewhat heated at the tone and smile of Sinclair, he added: "I feel so strongly on this matter that I would rather the devil himself should fill a seat at the table than sit down to it with thirteen."

"Aha!" cried Sinclair, "the devil is invited, but will his Satanic majesty come?"

While the tones of his voice were still vibrating, the bell rang. A moment later the servant announced:

"Mr. Sedley."

"Ah," said Vernon, much relieved, "here he is at last. How are you, Sedley? You are doubly welcome, for just before you came we were speculating as to whether your absence would not make it necessary for us to sit down with thirteen at table."

"I was detained," said Sedley briefly, "I ask your pardon."

There was something odd about his tone. I noticed it, and I saw that Vernon did so, too. But he replied:

"Don't mention it, old fellow. It's an accident which may happen to all of us."

But as I grasped Sedley's hand I met Vernon's eye. I don't know whether it was that or Sedley's hand which startled me. But if Vernon's look was peculiar, Sedley's hand-grasp was even more so. It was clammy, snake-like—ugh! I can remember it still.

We repaired to the table, and it was my lot to sit opposite to Sedley. Beside me sat Sinclair. But although he seemed in unusual spirits, and was more brilliant even than was his wont, the conversation flagged. There seemed to be some spell upon us, for all the guests were good fellows, and, as a rule, at dinner parties where there are no ladies the merriment is apt to be unchecked.

Yet it was so. As for myself, whenever I attempted any sally, I would catch the eye of Sedley, and it invariably exercised an unpleasant effect upon me. I could not divine the cause. Ordinarily Sedley was as jolly a fellow as you would find in a day's ride, but to-night—well, I couldn't understand it. I gave it up, and devoted myself to my dinner.

As if to complete the ill-fortune of the evening, the conversation persistently rolled on thirteen. The various superstitions with that number were discussed, and they were many. It seemed from the amount of curious lore brought forth by this discussion, that the evil properties of the number are by no means confined to the table.

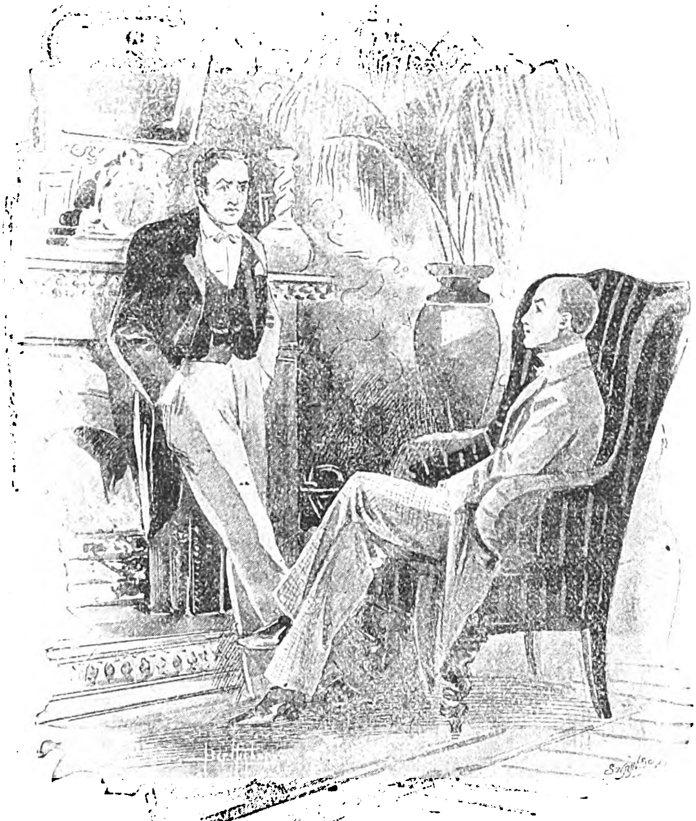
"It is said of the Turks," remarked Sinclair, as he sipped a glass of sherry, "it is said of the Turks that they consider the number thirteen so unlucky that they have almost expunged it from their vocabulary. They substitute for it the word *ziyadeh*, which is a sort of invocation, like that used by the Italians against the evil eye."

"So it seems, then," remarked Vernon, "that the prejudice against thirteen is not confined to the number of guests?"

"By no means. Yet that superstition is a wide-spread one. As everyone knows, its origin is generally attributed to the Last Supper, at which there were thirteen—Christ and the twelve apostles—and from which

Judas, with the Saviour's words of accusation still ringing in his ears, went forth to deliver up his master to the death. But the superstition is in reality much older. In the ancient Norse mythology, when the gods sat down to feast with Loki in the Walhalla, Baldur was the thirteenth at the board, and Baldur had to die. The same fallacy holds, I believe, in the vulgar superstition of to-day; those who believe that it is unlucky to sit with thirteen at table, also believe that the last man to seat himself will die before the year is out."

Sedley lifted his head, and fixed his eye on Sinclair. I had never noticed what extremely unpleasant eyes Sedley had. They were cavernous, piercing, green eyes, and there was a sinister gleam about them that night which actually made me uncomfortable. But apparently not so Sinclair.



One of the first men I went to see on my return was Vernon.

"The vulgar superstition, you say?" began Sedley. It was the first time he had spoken, and involuntarily a hush came over the table. "The vulgar superstition, you say? Do you not believe it, then?"

"Believe it? No!" sneered Sinclair. "It is an old wives' tale. It is fit only for the consideration of children and old women."

"By the way," said Vernon, looking round the table with an attempt at pleasantry, "who was the thirteenth man to sit down to-night?"

"Ay," added Sedley, in a tone which deprived the remark of all pleasantry, "who was the thirteenth man?"

We all looked round the table, and, as if by one accord, fixed our eyes on Sinclair.

"You were the thirteenth man, I believe, Sinclair?" said I.

"Yes, yes, it was Sinclair," came from every side.

Really, we were looking at him with a solemnity which was as absurd as it was amusing. Sinclair felt it, and endeavoured to remove the uneasy feeling which lay upon us by some witticism; but the jest fell flat. Its effect was not added to either by Sedley, who looked at him fixedly for some moments, and then said pointedly:

"So you were the thirteenth man to sit?"

"Yes; and what of it?" retorted Sinclair rudely. He was losing command of himself. "What does it matter to you?"

"To me—not at all. To you—perhaps much," was the strange reply of Sedley.

After this remark there was nothing to be said. The gaiety, if there were any, was hopelessly gone, and after a gloomy cup of coffee and a funereal cigar, the party rose; but instead of repairing to the smoking-room with the rest of us, Sedley declared that he must go.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" asked Vernon hospitably.

"I have something to attend to which cannot wait," he replied. "I beg you to excuse me. You know I would not leave the gathering were it not compulsory; but I must leave you. I am waited for." And as he pressed Vernon's hand, I saw, by the peculiar expression of the host's face, that he had noticed the same odd feeling in Sedley's hand that had struck me.

Sedley turned to Sinclair.

"Good-night, sir," he said. "I hope you may come to have more toleration for the superstition of others. Good-night; we shall meet again!" And as he took Sinclair's hand in his, I saw that the same strange feeling which had struck Vernon and myself was pervading him.

"Confound the fellow!" cried Sinclair, when the door was closed behind the gloomy guest. "He's a nice one to have at a convivial gathering. He reminds me of those cheerful Trappists, one of whose customs is to have a little friar at every meal, whose duty it is to say at intervals: 'Brothers, we must all die.' Good-bye and good riddance. May the devil go with him!"

The words clung to me: "May the devil go with him!" The devil? A strange farewell, truly, to a departing guest.

* * * * *

Six months had passed since the evening of the disagreeable dinner I have described. Family matters had called me from the city the very day after it took place, and they had been of such a nature as to keep me away a much longer time than I had anticipated. I had heard nothing, or next to nothing, from home since my departure. One of the very first things that teaches a man how little his friends care for him is their utter indifference to him the moment his back is turned.

Well, as I said, I had been away for a long time, and knew nothing of what had been taking place since my departure. One of the first men I went to see on my return was Vernon, and I besought him to tell me the news.

"News?" said he; "news? I know of nothing. It seems to me that you are the one to tell the news—you who come from the outside world. We here have been leading our everyday humdrum existence, with nothing to chronicle and nothing to tell."

"Nothing to tell!" I exclaimed. "That is always the cry of him who stays at home. He does not realise that everything is of interest to the wanderer—everything—scandal, births, marriages, and deaths."

"Deaths—yes," said he thoughtfully. "You speak of deaths. Of course you know that Sinclair is dead?"

"Sinclair dead?" said I. "You amaze me. Why, he was a young and vigorous man, and the last I saw of him he was in the most robust of health. Of what did he die?"

"The doctors called it pneumonia," replied Vernon, with a short cough.

"Pneumonia—well, well. They say it is the bane of civilisation; that our heated rooms, carelessness in exposure, and ways of living encourage it. Yet true it is that our grandfathers scarcely knew of it. So Sinclair is dead. Poor fellow! Why, it seems but yesterday I saw him in the heyday of manhood. Let me see—when was it that I saw Sinclair last? Why, it was at that dinner you gave, the day before I went away."

"Yes," assented Vernon, "it was an unfortunate dinner. I shall never forget it. Of course you know that Sedley is dead?"

"Sedley, too?" I cried, more shocked than I cared to show. "No, I knew nothing of it. What was the matter with him? When did he die?"

"Why, he died the day after you left the city—the day after the dinner, you know, or the night before," added Vernon gloomily. "I'm sure I don't know. There was some talk concerning it. It was very extraordinary."

"But tell me about it," I said; "I am entirely in the dark. I know of nothing that has taken place since my departure."

"Well," said Vernon uneasily, "I am sure I don't like to talk about it, for it's a very strange affair. If a man discusses it seriously he feels queer. You remember the dinner, of course?"

"I remember it very well."

"Well, you remember the strange manner of Sedley, his late arrival, his altered demeanour, and his clammy hands? I can feel the corpse-like clutch of his hand in mine yet." And Vernon inspected his hand uneasily, as if he expected to see marks upon it.

"Yes—go on."

"You know, too, that he and Jack Sinclair had some wordy sparring, in which Jack didn't come off best, as he generally did. I don't know that Sedley said it in so many words, but he certainly left the impression on most of our minds that Jack was going to die before the year was out."

"I remember."

"The party broke up in short order after his departure, and all went home feeling rather blue. You can, perhaps, imagine our feelings when we heard next day that Sedley was dead."

"Sedley dead? But how—why ——"

"Well, I suppose it was apoplexy—that's what the doctors called it. He was a bachelor, you know, and lived alone, with the exception of his servant. The man never stayed up for him when his master went out, but got things in readiness for his going to bed, then went to bed himself. The morning after the dinner Sedley was found lying on the floor dressed as if for dinner, and stone dead. He had been dead for hours—the corpse was cold."

I looked at Vernon curiously. "You say dressed *as if* for dinner. You mean dressed as he had been at dinner."

Vernon rubbed his nose in hesitation. "Well, I don't know," he said reflectively, "I suppose so. At all events, he was in his dinner dress. And he was dead."

I looked at him keenly. "You haven't told me all, Vernon," I said.

"That's all there is to tell," said he. "Unless it be for an absurd notion that poor Jack Sinclair got into his head."

"And what was that?"

"Well, of course, Jack was ill, and sick men are not responsible for the hallucinations which afflict them. But the notion Jack got was this. You see he remembered some foolish speech that I had made before the dinner in regard to being willing to have the devil himself make up the fourteen rather than sit at table with thirteen."

"Yes, I remember it."

"Most of those who were there remember it," said Vernon meditatively. "I wish their memories were not so good. Well, Jack took it into his head—but it's too absurd an idea to even think of seriously."

"Let me hear it, none the less."

"Before Jack died he said to me: 'Vernon, old boy, I'm afraid your wish came true.' 'What wish?' said I. 'You wished that the devil might come to your table rather than thirteen should sit there. *Vernon, the devil came.*' 'Nonsense, Jack,' said I, 'you're wandering; it was Sedley who came.' 'No,' said he, 'it may have been Sedley's body, but it wasn't Sedley's soul. Vernon, I tell you that Sedley died that night *before*, and not *after* dinner, and the fourteenth guest who sat there was the devil. I was the thirteenth, Vernon, and that's what's killing me.' 'Pooh!' said I, thinking to humour him, 'you're not going to die. Besides, that nonsense about the thirteenth man doesn't apply to you anyhow, for there were fourteen of us.' 'Fourteen guests—yes,' said he, with a sickly smile, 'but only thirteen men. Vernon, *it was the devil I was disputing with, and he's got me.*' I saw it was useless to attempt to cure him of his delusion, and so I left him. And that was the last time I saw Jack Sinclair alive."

JEROME HART.

YOUNG TOMMY.

SHE was very, very beautiful—in fact, so exquisitely beautiful that Tommy Rogers—Young Tommy Rogers, as he stood in the corner near the piano and watched her, thought he had never seen a more beautiful girl in all his days. And because those days, in the eyes of the world, had not been numerous—he was just twenty—he was no less in earnest, or less sincere in his adoration of her.

All the winter long she had been as much a central figure as girls get to be central figures in Society, for added to her own natural grace and manner, four years abroad had brought out every hidden charm of voice and feature, and had taught her to hide any little imperfections she may have possessed with artless art; and now, at this last dance before Lent, she seemed more than ever the belle whom men sought and women hated—as we are apt to seek or hate, according to our sex!

But though she had had admirers all her life, and she was more than twenty—a good five years more—she could not have had a more devoted adorer—lover—slave—than Young Tommy. He knew this was so, because no one had ever loved anyone as he loved her—or made such an ass of himself over a woman who did not think twice a day of him, as his more experienced elder brother told him.

And now, true enough, with men three-deep about her, and only an occasional gleam of the white neck and shoulders, or a glint of the rich yellow hair showing now and again between them, she was holding her court there by the window like the queen she was, and Tommy was not in or out of that court. "Why was he not?" demanded Young Tommy. "Well," said the elder brother, raising his eyebrows in a bored way, "because Tommy was young—too young, in fact."

Thus it was always; his greatest fault was his youth, and poor Tommy sometimes grew so desperate that he would threaten to blow out his young brains and lie in his grave until he was old, if it would have helped matters—which was not a pretty speech, from one point of view. So to-night when the elder brother impressed this upon the youth once again, it made Tommy feel so tired of everything, including the elder brother himself, that he thought he would go home.

It took him some time to make up his mind to do so, but at last he did, and keeping his eyes straight before him, lest he should catch a glimpse of her through the courtiers gathered about her, he marched straight for the door, wishing in his raging young heart that he might take those older men out, one at a time, and murder them by inches, for being old.

But he had thought himself stronger than he was, and at the door he turned for a last look of her, and a hot wave of surprise and glad surprise at that went over him. She was alone! Not a man near her; the three-deep court had vanished like snow in spring time, and the one or two solitary looking men in the room evidently did not know her. In a moment he was by her side, and she was letting the fine light in her fine eyes through the long lashes straight into his callow soul, while she told him how glad she was to have him near her again.

"I grew so tired of the other men," she said softly, "and so I sent them away—all of them—a moment ago, for I wanted you."

And poor Young Tommy's heart beat so fast at these words, whom no one in the world save Young Tommy would have heard seriously, that it was all out before he realised what he was saying, and there with the two or three solitary looking men grumbling commonplaces at each other at the further end of the room, he asked her to marry him.

Just the slightest tinge of additional colour crept into her delicate cheeks as he paused, but she smiled gently—a quiet, self-possessed little smile it was, too—and Young Tommy felt his heart, beating so happily a moment before, sink into his patent leathers again.

"It is very sweet of you, Mr. Rogers!" she said slowly, "and I am proud, as any girl would be, of having won your love, but—but——" she went on, with just the hint of vexation in her sweet voice, "think a moment, dear boy; how old are you?"

And with a groan that he could not have suppressed had there been a hundred men in the room, he got up and found his way into the conservatory, deserted now, as all well-behaved conservatories are, when one wants to be alone, leaving her there with the solitary men.

Half an hour later he heard whispering voices from the other side of the row of great palms, and raising his dejected head from his hands, his eyes fell upon the beautiful face he was so industriously endeavouring to blot out of his heart and mind. And because it was the last look, the very last look, he would ever have of her, he did not move for a moment, but let his boyish eyes drink in for that last time, the, to him, cruel beauty of her face, until——

"My love, my love!" It was not she who spoke; the voice was a man's, and the next instant Young Tommy saw him stoop and take her in his arms, and as her own white arms slipped about his neck he pressed kiss after kiss upon the white neck and red lips so close to him in an ecstasy of delirious happiness. And the man's wife, who stood talking with the hostess in the big room across the hall, wondered if it were not time for them to be going home to their little ones.

In another moment they were gone, and Tommy was alone again, his head in his hands. At the end of another half hour he rose slowly to his feet and shook himself together.

"Yes," said he, in answer to some inward thought, but without the shadow of a smile playing about his drawn lips, "yes, I am young; too young, thank Heaven, for that!"

Then he went back into the drawing-room.

EVERARD APPLETON.

HUNTED BY A JAGUAR

The ranch of Señor Diaz was on a charming slope, overlooking the broad, smooth waters of one of the tributaries to the Parana, on whose opposite shore the rank grass grew ten and twelve feet high. The house itself had a tropical character; it was Spanish-American, with a cool, shady verandah, a long, low front, painted walls and latticed windows, a spacious court, and a flat roof, provided with a parapet, which gave the whole structure the appearance of a fort. Many acres of cultivated land showed long lines of sugarcane and tall trees laden with bananas, in surprising contrast to the dark, impenetrable mass of wild bush-land which surrounded the settlement in the farther distance.

Señora Diaz was one of the tropical beauties of whom Murillo dreamt.

"I am going to test your gallantry," she said, coming out on the verandah where I sat, "by asking you to help me water my flowers, for with my lame hand it is not easy for me to lift the heavy watering-pot."

"I am at your service; but allow me—am I wrong?—to remind you that you promised me the story of how your hand was hurt."

"Certainly. As soon as the flowers are watered, we will have coffee on the verandah, and you shall hear all about it."

Accordingly, I was shortly sipping coffee with the little Lolita, my host's only daughter, and my pet beside me, while her mother rolled a cigarette, lighted it, and began as follows:

"When we first came here, years ago, it was a very different looking place. The wild bush-land reached to the edge of the water, and was such a dark wilderness of thorns, brambles, palms, wild fig trees, and other tropical vegetation, that I did not dare venture to its depths. But my husband and his workmen went manfully to work, felled trees, uprooted stumps, made hedges and ditches, all day long, except in the severest heat, and I often saw them come home so wearied that they would fall asleep where they stood, and first think of food three or four hours later when they awoke.

"After awhile they got a portion of the ground under subjection, but after the acres were cleared and we began to plant, we had a throng of foes to combat! The worst were the ants, which, watched for on account of their depredations on plantations, have a way of making underground passages, till they undermine the whole surface of a field, and it falls in like the crust of a cake. Just north of us is a great gap in the ground, full of bushes and wild grass, with here and there some rotten timber, where a whole settlement sank from the ants undermining the foundations. From this comes the saying we have in Paraguay that our worst enemies are the Indian braves and the Indian ants.

"Luckily, the only Indians were friendly ones, who exchanged all kinds of provisions, especially dried meats, for knives and brandy. We poisoned the ants, dug up their nests, flooded their passage ways with boiling water, and so in a great measure were free from them, although they now sometimes come from the woods to attack the plantation.

"One morning, just as we were at breakfast, one of our herdsmen brought the news that our cattle, which grazed in the tall grass on the other side of the river, had been attacked by a jaguar that had killed one of the bulls. The man who told us escaped with his life, yet he would have scarcely done so if he had not misled the beast, or had there not been a fat ox there.

"A week passed without a new alarm, and we had come to think less about it, when suddenly three or four Indians rushed in to tell us that a great jaguar had broken into their camp and killed a woman and one of their dogs. When my husband heard the story he concluded that it was the same animal that had attacked our bull, for the Indians described it as a creature of singular colour, far lighter than any they had seen about there, so they named it "The White Death." We all thought it high time to do something, and my husband called his people together to go out and hunt it.

"I remember that morning distinctly. They went away cheerfully enough, each man with his gun and hunting-knife, and Moro, the bloodhound, was with them. My husband turned round just as he entered the wood and kissed his hand to me; then he vanished into the forest.

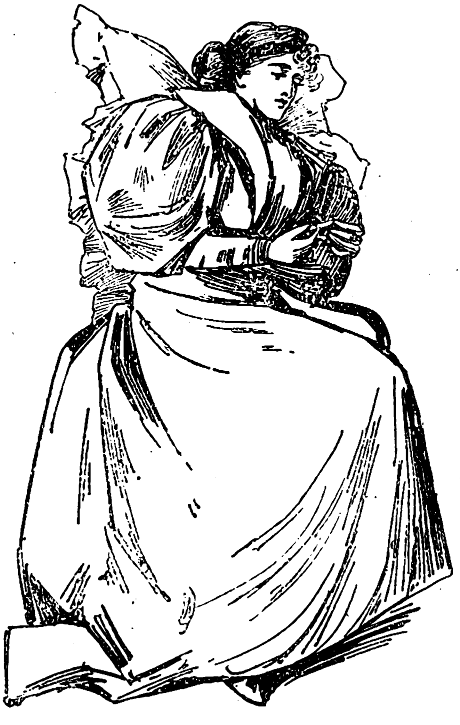
"When I found myself with Lolita alone in the house, and thought of what might happen if they met that terrible wild animal, such anxiety seized me (although I never thought I could be in danger) that I could not be contented till I had locked every door in the house; and then I seated myself in the great drawing-room, took Lolita on my lap, and tried to tell her a story.

"Suddenly I heard a scratching along the roof, and then a dull thud, as if something had fallen. Anxious and nervous as I was, I started up with a cry, although I had no presentiment what it was. The next moment I heard just over me a sound which I could not mistake—a long, passionate roar, that I often heard from the woods at night, and never without feeling as if my heart stood still. The thought rushed through my mind, 'the jaguar.'

"I shall never forget that moment! One minute I was quite rigid and helpless, as if life had departed, and then a thought flashed upon me; the jaguar was not to be kept off if he penetrated here from the roof, for most of the inner doorways had only draperies. In my dining-room was a great wooden meal chest, nearly empty, and large enough to hold six or seven persons at once. If Lolita and I could get there, thought I, we are safe.

"I seized the child, ran with her into the dining-room, and crept into the chest. Unfortunately it had a spring lock, so that I was forced to hold the lid open with my left hand to guard against its locking and immediately stifling us; but it had more than an inch of outer rim, which completely hid my fingers.

"It was not a moment too soon. We were scarcely hidden when I heard the great claws scratching along the floor, and the hungry sniffing of the jaguar showed me that he was in search of food. He came straight to the chest, and paused a moment, as if he feared a trap. Then he put his head close to the small opening, so that I could fell his hot breath. He sniffed awhile, and then tried to raise the lid with his paw.



Her mother rolled a cigarette.

"How I trembled! But, thank God, the great paw would not go into the narrow crevice, and I held the cover fast by clinging to the inner part of the lock with all the strength of desperation. All he could do was to stretch out his tongue and lick my fingers, until they bled as if they had been scratched by a saw. And then, as he tasted blood, and heard Lolita cry (for my poor darling was just as frightened as I was), his eagerness increased, and he began to make piercing yells, which sent icy chills through me.

"I wonder why the fright did not kill me; but the touch of Lolita's little arm round my neck seemed to keep up my courage.

"Still, the worst was yet to come. When the jaguar found that he could not reach me from below he sprang upon the chest. His huge weight crushed my fingers between the two parts of the lock. Then I thought all was over, and uttered a shriek that rang through the whole house.

"But my cries were answered by a sound which made my heart throb with joy—answered by the barking of our bloodhound. The jaguar heard it, too, for he sprang down, and stood a moment listening, then ran to the door as if to flee.

"Again came the sound of the dog's bark—this time nearer—and at the same time the voice of men calling to each other. Contrary to expectation, they were already coming back. Meanwhile the jaguar seemed to be bewildered, and ran wildly to and fro. Suddenly a loud cry came from one of the windows, and then two shots and a fearful howl. Then my husband's voice anxiously called:

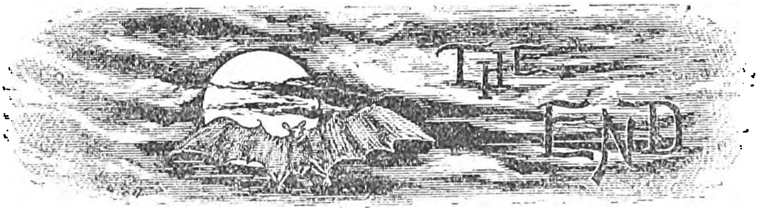
"'Cachita, where are you?'

"I could just get out of the chest, drag myself to the door, and let my husband in. Then I swooned away. They told me afterwards that our bloodhound found the jaguar's trail, leading straight back to the house, and they all hurried home, fearing harm would come to me.

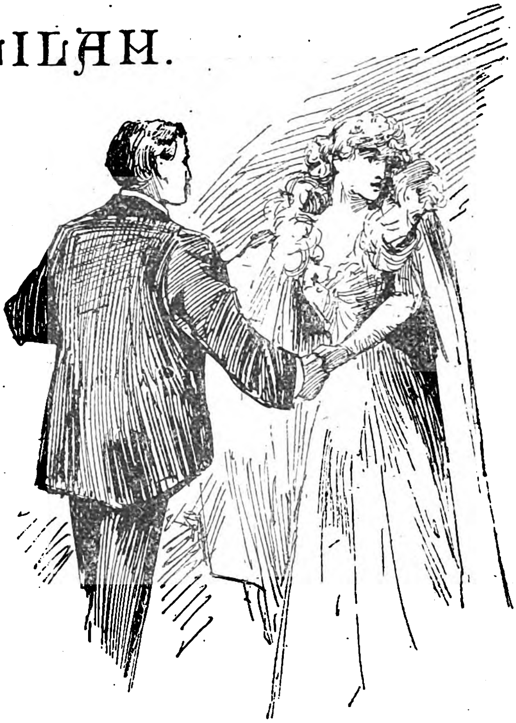
"My husband and José came on ahead, and shot the jaguar through the window.

"I could not move a joint of that hand for many weeks afterwards. The Indians gave me medicine to heal it, and they say that after awhile I can use it again. I did not need this injury to make me remember that day. If I were to live a thousand years I could not forget the terrible moments I spent in the chest."

E. F. DAWSON.



MADAME DELILAH.



“THAT at least is certain; it will mean a baronetcy for me.”

Percival Dufferin swung round leisurely in his chair as he spoke, and pressed an electric bell at his elbow.

His servant, coming in a moment later, found him leaning back with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and the tips of his fingers lightly pressed together. There was a look in his face which even the man noticed, a look of one who was lifted up, whose whole being was pervaded with the intoxicating ether of sublime contentment.

From this position he did not move. His eyes followed the servant as he placed the silver reading lamp on the table, drew the heavy curtains across the windows, and finally removed the tray of tea things which stood neglected where they had been set down half an hour before, but his mind was far away in some distant dreamland.

A glance round the cosy room, lit up with the soft effulgence thrown by the yellow shade of the lamp, was sufficient to reveal that the owner was a man of expensive and artistic taste. Yet the whole place was in orderly confusion. The desk at which he sat was littered with proofs and books; there were books on the floor and books on the seat of every chair within reach of his arm. Most of these volumes were uncut.

Percival Dufferin, poet, critic, and reader to the publishing firm of which he was a partner, was, perhaps, the most conscientious worker in London. His face, handsome always, was almost beautiful at this moment. The brown eyes were sparkling, and the well-formed mouth was parted in a smile which seemed to express unfathomable depths of happiness.

Although still early, he was in evening dress. The tail-coat, however, had been discarded for a well-worn smoking jacket, emblazoned on the pocket with the Magdelene arms; while a box of cigars lay open on the table before him.

“Yes, a baronetcy,” he repeated to himself, coming suddenly to an upright position. “How pleased Gwen will be!”

He bent forward as he spoke, and opened one of the drawers of the bureau. The manuscript of a novel lay inside neatly tied with pink tape. It was type-written, but on the uppermost sheet was scrawled in a running hand:

“Madame Delilah,” by H.R.H. Prince ——, and then followed the name of the illustrious author.

So immersed was he in his contemplation that Dufferin did not hear the door open, and it was only at the sound of the soft *frou frou* of a woman's skirt which made him look up quickly, and then spring to his feet with a little exclamation of delight.

“Gwen!”

“Val!”

She cast a quick glance round the room, and he went forward to meet her with outstretched hands.

“I thought I must come up for a moment,” she said rather breathlessly. “You are not busy?”

“Never, when I have you to idle with,” he answered softly.

Her white fingers lay in his for a minute, and then he turned and swept a pile of books from an easy chair, wheeling it up to the fire for her.

“I must not stop,” she said, with another quick glance round the room. Yet she did not resist as he bent over her to remove her cloak, only her hands trembled a little as they rested on his arm.

He carried the wrap across the room, poked the fire into a blaze, and came back to where she was standing in her shimmering white silk dress and the ostrich plumes of her fan pressed against her cheek. Dufferin noticed a subtle perfume in the room. It was a scent he loved, the scent of violets, which somehow he always associated with her in his mind.

“Are you glad to see me, Val?” the girl asked. She had sunk into the proffered chair, and her blue eyes looked up half coquettishly into his handsome face.

“Gwen, when you are not with me life becomes merely existence.”

He spoke passionately, and then with a restless movement he turned round and laid his fingers on the mantelpiece, and stared down with unseeing eyes at the leaping flames.

The fan which lay across the girl's knee trembled a little.

Gwendoline Mallow was a girl whom men call beautiful, and women, with a shrug of their shoulders, good looking. She made a lovely picture in that dim ruddy light as she sat in the depths of the low roomy chair, such as a man delights in. The rippling hair was brought down low over the forehead—so low that only a glimpse of white skin showed over the delicate arch of the eyebrows. Her eyes were bluest of blue, large and rather expansive. Her features small and regular, and the bright colouring lent a certain piquancy to the face. Yet the smiling lips had a dangerous tendency to fall in sarcastic curves at the corners; there were times when the tender expression melted away till the mouth became stern and almost cruel.

A moment passed in silence, and then the man spoke again without changing his position. There was a palpable tremor in his voice:

"Gwen, how long have you been engaged to Sir Henry. How long has this miserable farce been going on?"

There was a disdainful shrug of the pretty shoulders.

"I don't know. About three years, I suppose. It seems an interminable time."

"And yet you are going to make it an eternity. You are going to marry him in spite of everything?" He turned now and faced her. A subdued light was burning in his eyes, and his hands were clasped together.

"I suppose so!" Her voice sounded hard and indifferent. Yet she was nervous and agitated, far more so than he, who could only judge by the outward appearance, had any idea.

"You see," she went on, "this engagement has been published, as it were, on the housetops! It cannot very well be broken off. Besides, a woman must marry some day."

She had risen with the evident intention of going, and stood for a moment with her hands outstretched towards the fire. Her heart was beating fast, and the long white arms trembled a little.

"There is no law against her marrying the man she loves," observed Dufferin drily.

"Perhaps he has never said a word that could be construed into a proposal of marriage. It would be rather venturesome for a woman to set her heart on that before he had ever asked her to be his wife."

Just for a moment a sudden light came into the man's face. Was it possible that she meant all that her words conveyed? He hesitated a moment and then his countenance fell.

"It's all very well for you to cast that in my teeth," he said with sudden warmth. "Yet you know why I have never spoken; you know that your ambition is too great to be content with any husband who could not give you a title."

"That goes without saying, of course," she said lightly.

But she was dreadfully angry with him all the same; more angry, perhaps, than she had ever been in her life.

Dufferin, however, did not notice the ominous compression of the lips. To him there was nothing extraordinary in such an aspiration. In Miss Mallow's place he would certainly have played his cards to become "My Lady."

He came a little nearer to her and placed one of his hands on hers as it lay outstretched on the mantlepiece.

"Gwen," he said passionately, "suppose that I was to win a baronetcy, would you marry me then? For God's sake have pity on me."

He stood before her with bowed head.

Outside they could hear the dull roar of the Piccadilly traffic; the rumble of wheels; the thud of the horses feet on the slippery wood; the shrill voices of the newsboys.

There was still anger in the girl's heart. Yet she felt that she was powerless before this man; her body and soul were his.

At last she spoke.

"That would certainly make a difference," she said deliberately.

"Then you will marry me?" cried Dufferin eagerly.

"You are not a baronet yet," she replied with a rippling laugh.

How stupid he was!

It was then that there came back to his eyes that look which had given a sort of sublimity to his face earlier in the evening. His joy was almost too great to be contained.

He went across the room to his desk and laid his hand on the open drawer.

"In here," he said, "is the manuscript of a novel called 'Madame Delilah,' by Prince ——; that is enough for me."

Miss Mallow came across the room to his side. Her blue eyes were opened wide with amazement.

"But surely you don't mean that you will get a baronetcy for publishing a book just because it is written by a member of the Royal family?"

"Not in the ordinary way, perhaps. But, in the first place, this is the utmost twaddle. I must lose money over it. I deserve something as recompense for that. Besides, I have already done something for my party! This will be the finishing touch."

He untied the pink tape as he spoke, and placed the first two chapters of the story in Miss Mallow's hand.

"It seems to me," she said, dropping for a moment into the comfortable writing chair and spreading the manuscript upon the table, "that it is iniquitous that members of the Royal family should do this kind of thing. Their books ought to be published for private circulation only. To the public, of course, it does not matter; they take a morbid delight in getting a peep into the workings of these august minds; it is struggling authors and those who have to make their living out of writing on whom it is so hard!"

"It is not a bad plot," said Dufferin, half apologetically. He was quite in accordance with the girl's sentiments; if "Madame Delilah" had been written by anyone else, more than the first three or four chapters would never have been read. He told her the outline of the story briefly, while she sat at the table turning over the leaves in her hand.

When he finished, she looked up.

"What an extraordinary thing," she exclaimed. "You remember that manuscript you gave me to read the other day, Val, and which you said began so well that you were sure it was quite worth reading? Well, that turns on much the same plot as you have been telling me. Precisely the same. And what is more it is a masterpiece; it is a book which is bound to sell, which will become famous. I meant to have told you before."

Dufferin shrugged his shoulders.

"It is hard on the author, whoever he may be—some absolutely unknown man, wasn't it?"

"It is hard on the Prince, I should say."

"Why, it won't make any difference to him."

"Yes, it will. The novel I read for you was written first; you will have to publish it and let the other go."

Dufferin laughed with a quiet amusement.

"I am afraid, Gwen, you are not a woman of business. The manuscript you have will not even be mentioned to the firm. It will simply be rejected with thanks."

Gwen's eyes flashed indignantly.

"And what excuse will you give?" she inquired, swinging round in the chair with an ironical lift of her pretty eyebrows.

"That—oh! Anything, don't you know? That it is not suitable, that the plot is not a new one."

The sound of the clock striking made the girl look up.

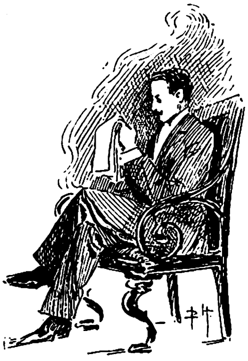
"Surely it is not so late as that! I must be going at once. I promised to meet father at the Lyceum punctually at eight."

She rose in sudden consternation at finding how the time had slipped by. Dufferin went across the room for her cloak. She forgot everything except that they were going to part.

In fastening her wrap his face came very near to hers.

She felt his warm breath on her cheek; she could almost hear his heart beating against hers. The next instant his arm had slipped round her waist and for one delirious, intoxicating moment their lips met. A minute later and she was gone.

Percival Dufferin closed the door behind her and went back to his desk.


He took it up.

For some time he sat thinking over his good fortune, his eyes closed and his legs stretched out under the table.

Then he roused himself, took up his pen, finished and sealed the letter he had been writing, and cast a look round the table preparatory to leaving off work for the night. In the mood he was in business was impossible.

Suddenly he leant across the desk and drew a pile of manuscript towards him. It was the story which he had given Gwendoline Mallow to read.

He took it up, glanced through the first chapters which he had already perused, and began reading with the extraordinary rapidity which men who read much acquire.

At first he was merely amused at the similarity of the two plots; then he became interested and finally absorbed. He read on, forgetful of time, forgetful of his own dinner, oblivious to everything but the vivid style and the entrancing interest of the story.

Finally the last chapter was reached. The room seemed to have become close. There was perspiration on his forehead; yet when he turned round he found that the fire had burned down and was out.

"It is a pity," he said musingly. "Yet this will have to be wasted." He rose, and began pacing up and down the room. Finally he sat down at the piano and began to strum. In the interests of the firm he ought to reject the Prince's book. Yet to do that was to throw away everything which made life worth living; to ruin his own happiness.

Finally, he went back to the writing-table, scribbled a short note, and ringing for his servant, told him to take the manuscript round that night by hand. The sight of it was becoming obnoxious.

Then he remembered that he had had nothing to eat since lunch, sent for a cab, and drove round to the club for dinner in an exceedingly happy frame of mind!

* * * * *

The following evening Percival Dufferin went to call on the Mallows. It was a clear starlight evening, and as he was early in starting he decided to go viâ Hyde Park, on foot. As he strolled along his mind went back to the previous evening. His conscience had pricked him more than once during the day on the matter of the rejected manuscript. Yet he consoled himself with the thought that a poor novel by a member of the Royal family would possibly sell as well as a clever book by an unknown author. It was weak comfort, but it assuaged the feeling of having betrayed his trust.

Very few people were about in the Park. As he emerged by the side of the Serpentine it was hard to realise that he was standing in the heart of the busiest city in the world. There was not a sound to be distinguished except the soft licks of the water against the sides of the little bridge at the eastern extremity of the lake. He rested here for a while, and presently became aware of someone who had risen from an iron seat a few hundred yards away, and was now standing gazing down into the water. By degrees the man came towards the bridge. Dufferin could not distinguish his face, but he saw that he was in rags, and his movements somehow raised his suspicions.

"If I was driven to sleeping out here," he thought, "I think I should be coward enough to put myself out of my misery."

Then he began to think what an unjust world it was which drove men to such extremities.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "this is a man of education and refinement. Perhaps he is even a genius, whom the world will not recognise. What numbers of capable men there are starving at the present moment."

All the time he was watching the man closely.

"Some people," he went on pursuing his own thoughts, "declare that a man must have some flaw if he cannot keep his head above water. That I do not believe. It may be the sins of the fathers visited upon the children; yet some men are haunted by ill-luck; some malign destiny seems to thwart them through life."

His reflections came to a sudden end.

Without a cry, without a sign of his intention, the melancholy stranger had suddenly plunged into the water. It did not take an instant for Dufferin to fling off his coat and dive from where he stood into the circling eddy which marked the spot where the man had sunk.

There was a short struggle in the water; the suicide fought with terrible despair for death. More than once Dufferin felt himself being drawn down in the clutches of this desperate man.

Finally he conquered.

The two men dripping from head to foot stood facing one another on the bank. By the light of the flickering gas-lamp Dufferin saw that this poor creature he had saved was little more than a boy; his face was white and thin, his eyes bloodshot.

They were both out of breath.

Presently the boy spoke.

"Why did you not let me drown?" he asked in a thick, husky voice. "I don't want to live. What is the use of living?"

Dufferin laid his hand kindly on the boy's shoulder.

"Some day you will thank me. No man, remember, has a right to put an end to his life. Existence is a debt which he owes to society."

The boy began to shiver. Dufferin himself felt a chill run through him.

"My rooms are near here," he said. "Come along and I will lend you something dry to put on."

The boy resisted. Dufferin became authoritative, and he yielded with a bad grace.

"What made you attempt to take your own life?" he asked as they walked rapidly towards his rooms.

The boy's teeth chattered.

"Because any death is better than starvation," he answered grimly.

By degrees Dufferin wormed his story from him. It was the saddest and most pathetic story he had ever heard. The boy had been thrown out of work; he had attempted to gain employment and failed; there was an invalid mother at home, and a girl whom he loved. Things had gone from bad to worse. After a time his mother had died. His poverty became so awful that the last atom of self respect left him, and he no longer dared even to see his divinity. He wrote and told her that he was going away; that he would never come back again, and his letter must be farewell for ever.

In his rags no employer would look at him. His last chance of obtaining work had gone. Finally he had attempted to write a book, keeping himself by holding horses in the street.

"At college I had been the editor of the *Granta*," he said, with a sudden flash of pride as he noticed the look which unconsciously spread over Dufferin's face. "I knew I had it in me to write. This was my last hope. I sent the work into some publishers and waited. Two weeks passed, and I began to hope."

The voice broke off abruptly.

"Well? It may be all right still. Sometimes it is weeks before a publisher has time to read the MS. which is sent in to him."

"It came back last night—rejected."

Dufferin felt inexpressibly sorry for the boy.

"Do you think it was a good story?" he asked kindly. He wondered whether his unknown author had been in such a plight as this poor fellow.

"I thought it was; it seemed good to me."

"I tell you what," said Dufferin, "send it along to me. I am a publisher. Perhaps I might be able to help you. Opinions differ you know on the merits of a work."

The boy seized his hand in sudden gratitude. The tears sprang to his eyes and choked him. He attempted to say something, and broke down utterly.

"My name is Dufferin," the publisher went on, deeply moved by the other's emotion. "You may, perhaps, have heard of it."

"Ah!"

It was a cry almost of agony which broke from the boy's lips. Dufferin stood still, as if he had been shot. Perhaps a suspicion of the truth flashed through his mind.

"It was you who sent back my book."

Dufferin said afterwards that that was the supremest moment of his life, yet he did not hesitate an instant.

"What is your name?" he inquired gently.

"Murray."

"Your manuscript was not returned."

"It was, and a letter came with it from you."

"There must have been some mistake, that is all. Your book will be published as soon as we can set it up in type."

No one, perhaps, will ever know what that moment cost Percival Dufferin. He was acting on impulse. Yet he spoke deliberately—deliberately he swept away his whole future happiness; in a dozen words he banished for ever his hope of marrying the girl he loved.

After that he went on like a man in a dream.

At last his rooms were reached; he shook himself together, ordered two baths to be prepared, and arranged everything in his own bedroom that the boy could want.

Then he left him, and went just as he was, and sat down in his sitting-room, and covered his face with his hands, and strong man that he was, cried his heart out like a child.

Presently he looked up and discovered a letter lying on his blotting-pad. One glance, and he knew that it was Gwennie Mallow's writing.

He opened it mechanically.

It was perfumed slightly with violets, and the scent made him turn sick and faint. He pushed it away from him, his eyes were blurred, he could not see to read.

Presently a little slip of newspaper cutting inclosed in the envelope caught his attention.

Then he made another effort to read the letter; perhaps there was something which he might do for her.

It was quite a short note, written in the smooth running hand he knew so well.

"Dear Mr. Dufferin," it ran, "no doubt you will have seen the inclosed notice of Sir Henry Ornham's death in the evening papers. I am writing to you at once lest you should raise any false hopes upon it. I am free now, but I can never marry you. It may be ridiculous, indeed I know it is ridiculous, yet I can never bring myself to think of you as I did before, after last night. Your action in regard to the Prince ———'s novel is unjust and unfair, nor is it worthy of a gentleman. I do not know what strange opinion you have formed of me, nor can I imagine why you should have supposed that I would only marry someone who could give me a title. Believe me, the Mr. Dufferin I used to know will ever hold a place in my heart which Sir Percival Dufferin never will and never can.—Yours sincerely, G. Mallow."

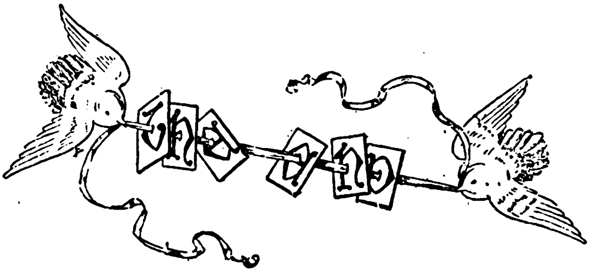
For a moment Dufferin sat rigid in his chair.

Then he rose slowly to his feet. His eyes were shining, and the old smile had come back to his lips. He crossed over the room and glanced at the clock.

"There is still time to go round there to-night," he said to himself.

And when he had changed his clothes he went round and took Murray with him to introduce the boy to the woman who had first found merit in his story.

Alder Carr.



Count Volpatelli's Idea.

"COUNT, that is a very good idea. I am sure we can carry it out admirably. It is new, and nothing takes as well as a novelty. Don't breathe a word about it to a soul. I won't even tell Ned. What fun it will be if he gets caught, too!"

"I'm charmed that you like it, Mrs. Browne," said Count Volpatelli, twirling his long, silky moustache and smiling on the pretty woman with his most "what-a-lovely-creature-you-are" manner. Count Volpatelli was a dapper little Italian, dark-eyed and olive-skinned. He spoke English fluently, but with a fascinating Neapolitan accent. Young Wallace Hinton had met him in Monte Carlo, and had made his sister, Mrs. Homer Binnington, take him up in Cannes—something that gave the little foreigner the *entrée* everywhere in that paradise of the elect. He was quite a success. He had such an unflagging vivacity and delightful courtesy, even where the silliest or the ugliest women were concerned. Perhaps he was not as undiscriminating as he seemed, but that only proved him the more clever.

Mrs. Browne had a large undertaking on her capable little hands. But she was a Napoleon in petticoats. At all events Cannes was going to be her Waterloo or her crown. This was the undertaking: to make English society on the Riviera accept her as a social somebody, and a pretty important somebody at that.

When she had applauded the idea Count Volpatelli suggested for her entertainment, and had predicted its success, because it was new, she had not reflected that not everything new is sure of scoring—new people, for instance. Mrs Browne had no aspiration in the direction of the "New Woman." She wanted to range herself with the most conventional Old Woman. But she was very new.

She had just alighted at Society's caravansary, and was not quite certain what kind of rooms she was going to get. She aimed at a corner apartment on the ground floor. There was good reason to believe that she would "arrive" with a rush, for she was pretty, vivacious, adorably amiable, had a quick instinct for detecting the "right thing" and the proper way to do it, and could feel a social reef without having to run on it first. Then—important adjunct—she had Mr. Browne, her husband.

Ned Browne had inherited immense wealth from his father. So far as he cared, Society could have gone on to the end without his bothering about it. He had been a stranger to it, and would have remained outside its gates for ever without a flicker of discontent. But he was a good husband, and loved Mrs Browne in a strong, simple, and rather obsolete fashion. Since she loved Society and wanted it, he was willing to pay whatever it would cost, and backed her loyally in her campaign against its stronghold.

The *musicale*, to which Count Volpatelli had consented to add brilliancy by "doing a turn," was the first entertainment Mrs. Browne had ventured on. She had secured the best professional talent—through cheques. But she was loath that everything on the occasion should be "hired." By her bright cajoling ways she had coaxed several men of the smart set to do something for her, and now Count Volpatelli had given his assistance. He had not done anything as an entertainer in Cannes before, which lent the more prestige to his appearance on this occasion. His idea had struck Mrs. Browne as quite up-to-date, and she was grateful to the good-natured little foreigner for helping her out.

She did not fail to play the Volpatelli card for all it was worth. It was such an original idea, this of the Count's. Oh, she couldn't tell what it was going to be. He had bound her to the most tremendous secrecy. But it would be a surprise to everybody. In which last assertion dear Mrs. Browne was positively Sybiline, if she had only known it.

Society had got so far towards letting in the Brownes as to accept invitations to their villa. The things to eat were always excellent, and there was a profusion of things to drink. It is astonishing how much this counts with people who are so plentifully fed. The passion for food is a lusty one in Society, and if there were more time between meals, it would probably have developed ruminants before this.

Mrs. Browne's invitations to attend functions were not as yet so numerous as to make it a difficult task to balance her engagement-book. But a number of the good men liked little Mrs. Browne, and helped her with their wives. So on the afternoon of the *musicale* that lady had the delight of seeing her rooms so crowded as to be uncomfortable. It was a little crush. Most of the interest centred on Count Volpatelli's turn. He was sandwiched between Madame X——, of the opera, who sang "Les Filles de Cadix," and some selections by the orchestra.

The Count had arrived early, with a Gladstone bag that suggested an elaborate "make-up," and had carefully deposited it upstairs. Some time before his "turn" he himself disappeared in that upper region.

Expectation was on tip-toe. Women craned their necks to catch the earliest glimpse of him, and chatted volubly, making various conjectures as to what he would do. After a delay of some moments, as befitted the principal star's *entrée*, there was a burst of laughter, though there was a look of surprise on the faces of many at the Count's audacity. He, an Italian, and a nobleman, to actually appear at a *musicale* as an—organ grinder!

For that is what came down the stairs, that and a thoroughly professional looking organ, and, perched on the torture-box, as much pleased by his *début* in polite society as the most artless of buds, a superannuated monkey. He had that air of withered vivacity and apprehensive vigilance that marks the Simian race.

But the Count was as cool as possible as he stolidly advanced and began to grind. He was beautifully made up, for the paint was thickly applied, and the short beard grew in a very sharp line from the cheeks. But his dark eyes were Volpatellian, despite the accentuated eyebrows. The Count wore gloves on his hands as if the difficulty of rendering those aristocratic members at all like an organ grinder's plebeian paws was too great to be even attempted.

The organ was the usual blatant, sharply rattling thing, and to add to the burlesque, Count Volpatelli ground it with a record-breaking velocity that made the music ridiculous instead of merely painful—an improvement, of course.

"Why, you'd never recognise him," said Mrs. Strachan.

"The beard is a clever disguise, but nothing could ever deceive me about those eyes," replied Miss Anstruthers, with an air—the Count had been sentimentally disposed towards the young woman in question.

It was too funny, everybody thought it "so droll," and "so clever, don't you know," of the Count. Then the amusement increased when, at the end of the grind, the Count gravely sent round the monkey with a little red cap to collect. The women who had their purses dropped coins into the cap, and Miss Anstruthers, who had her *portemonnaie* irremediably lodged somewhere in the rear of her gown, below the waist line, playfully deposited a corsage bouquet of violets, as big as a cauliflower, in the cap.

The Count was applauded, and after some delay, responded, and to everybody's surprise, sang "Santa Lucia" with the most cheerful exaggeration of tone and intense bravura style. It was so realistic that some in the front row almost imagined they detected a flavour of garlic in the air.

Then the Count, organ, "monka," coin, and corsage violets all disappeared in a hansom.

"He is going home to take his make-up off," said Mrs. Browne, gaily. "We shall have to wait until the Casino dance this evening to congratulate him."

The *musicale* was a great success, largely through Count Volpatelli's idea. Everybody thought it was very nice of him, to have so generously taken part.

Mrs. Browne had a small dinner party that evening, and after it the guests were to go to the Casino dance. When the vivacious little blonde went upstairs to dress, she began to think that perhaps the Count's scheme was not the very great success it had appeared. At least, not so far as she was concerned. She found that some of her choicest jewels were gone, as well as several gold-backed toilet articles, her watch, and a sum of money from her dressing-table.

She called the servant who had been on that floor during the afternoon, and asked if he had remained there all the time. He said he had not. Count Volpatelli had sent him with a note to some one, and he had been gone half an hour.

Mrs. Browne flew downstairs. She found her husband in his evening clothes, smoking a cigarette and reading the evening paper. What a position for a man to be in and have disaster fall upon him. But Mrs. Browne had to tell him, and she did so promptly.

"Ned," she said hurriedly, "my jewels, gold-backed toilet things, watch and money have all been stolen. That horrid organ-grinder must have taken them."

"What! The Count?" exclaimed her husband, sitting up very straight.

"Oh, the organ-grinder wasn't the Count," said Mrs. Browne plaintively. "He was a real organ-grinder, the regular thing."

"How did he get there?" demanded Mr. Browne.

"It was an idea of Count Volpatelli's, and I thought it so clever," said Mrs. Browne forlornly. "The Count saw this man in the street, and he said it would be such a lark to have him painted up and passed off for himself in disguise. Then, when people were all sold, we were going to tell them," added the wife of his bosom, looking rather foolish.

"Tell me all about it," Mr. Browne returned, with great interest.

"Why, that's all there is, Ned," Mrs. Browne answered tearfully, "except that my things are stolen. It seems the Count had to send the servant out on a message, and that nasty organ man must have stolen the things. I'm afraid I've been a fool, Ned," said the poor little woman, contritely.

"So have I," he replied briskly. "But, my dear, it isn't the organ-grinder," he added quickly. "It's the noble Count. To think of a little, sunny, oily Italian doing us like that!" He grinned, despite himself.

"Oh, Ned!" cried Mrs. Browne, "not Count Volpatelli. How can you think it was he?"

"Why, you little goose, the organ-grinder went off after the concert was over and he had no bag. Count Volpatelli sent our man away on this imaginary message, and then took the things. Don't say a word about it to anyone," he added, briskly getting to his feet. "Get ready and go to the dance, and I'll look up the Count and the organ man. Don't fret too much about it. I'm as big a goose as you. I lent the Count a cool £500 yesterday, because his remittance hadn't come, or some such tomfoolery. Go to the dance, just the same, and not a word to a soul."

"It will be lovely explaining this joke, Ned," said Mrs. Browne. "Miss Anstruthers will be so pleased to know that she bestowed her violets on a real, live, horrid, garlicky, Italian organ-grinder. She knew the Count's eyes, you know, though he was so beautifully made up!"

Mr. Browne drove at once to Count Volpatelli's lodgings. He was not surprised to find that he was not there. The servant said that he had taken his dress clothes with him when he went out in the afternoon, as he meant to dine out, and then go to the Casino ball. He hurried to the Casino and discovered that the Count was not there, and had not been there. A man who was rather friendly with the Count said he had received a note from him saying that owing to a telegram he had received he had been obliged to suddenly leave Cannes for Paris.

Mr. Browne betook himself to the police headquarters, and engaged the services of two detectives to pursue the Count. On his return he discovered the nobleman's assistant, the veritable organ-grinder. He was pretty well convinced, from his story, that there was no collusion on the man's part. He said Count Volpatelli had hired him to play at the *musicale*, and had him painted up, so that he would look something like him. The Count had suggested to him sending the "monka" round, and had generously allowed him to keep the contributions. The Count had given him a louis for his services, and he had not seen him since.

"He nica man," said the simple son of Italy gratefully.

"Very," said Mr. Browne heartily. "So generous—with other people's things. Oh! what did you do with the bouquet of violets?" he asked.

"Me solda for fifty cents. Vary beeg," said the grinder, with a child-like smile.

"The 'monka' is the only one in the trio that didn't make anything out of the job," thought Browne to himself.

Though it cost money to do it, the Count was overtaken and the stolen things recovered. Then Browne was inclined to let him get out of the country, but Mrs. Browne would not hear of it.

"How cruel you women are!" expostulated Browne. "I've heard you say 'the Count' was such a 'charming fellow.'"

"So he was," replied Mrs. Browne, with energy; "and that is why I want him imprisoned."

The Brownes never explained the joke, though keeping it quiet was the most expensive item of the *musicale*.

Le Vier.

THE QUEEN OF NIGHT

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By HEADON HILL,

(*Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," "The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.*)

SUMMARY.

Gaston Vizard gives to Sir Simon Crawshay an introduction to the agent of the vessel *Queen of Night*, in order that he may make special arrangements with regard to the trip of his wealthy ward, Miss Challenor. Dr. Zavertal calls on Vizard, and informs him that a new captain will be wanted before the next cruise.

The *Queen of Night*, under the guise of a popular pleasure boat, is used in reality by a set of unscrupulous adventurers for the purpose of doing away with objectionable relatives.

In Chapter I. Cyril Forrester receives his dismissal from the Flower Steamship Company for breaking the regulations while saving the life of Miss Aline Challenor. He applies for and obtains from Nathan and Co., of Fenchurch Street, the vacant command of the ocean yacht, *Queen of Night*.

Becoming engaged to Miss Challenor (who comes in for a quarter of a million on attaining her majority), he obtains an interview with Sir Simon Crawshay, who promptly refuses a consent to his engagement, and informs him that his ward will be out of his way for the next six weeks, as she is about to take a cruise on board the *Queen of Night!* On going aboard he is introduced to Dr. Zavertal, among whose patients are Miss Challenor, the Earl of Durranmore (a boy of fourteen coming into £40,000 a year), and Desmond Orlebar, whose death however occurs when off Gibraltar.

A stowaway is discovered and put ashore. A well-known detective, Kennard, travelling as an American, "Gen. Waldo," reveals himself to Captain Forrester, and imparts his suspicions. At Genoa a passenger comes aboard, whose voice Forrester immediately recognises as that of the stowaway.

CHAPTER XII.

ENTRAPPED.

As to Vizard's identity with the stowaway there was no doubt in my mind at all. His height and build were similar, and, allowing for the difference caused by the bushy, black hair and whiskers which "Enriquez" had worn, the features I now saw were the same. In the wisdom that comes after the event I wondered that I had not recognised him before, but it was the voice that did it.

With difficulty I forced myself to give him a civil answer, having no wish in Aline's presence to demand the explanation I meant to have from him, and luckily he relieved me from the need for further caution by almost immediately going below to see the chief-steward about his berth.

One thing was very certain—whether there was anything in Kennard's graver charges or no, the *Queen of Night* was too full of petty mystery for my liking, and I made up my mind there and then to have an end of it. My discovery of Vizard's peculiar conduct in coming aboard as a stowaway after booking a passage would furnish me with a quite legitimate excuse for raising the question of his relations with Zavertal, and after the rumpus that was sure to ensue I hoped that the air would be cleared all round by a disclosure of anything that was not on the square.

Being detained over some trifle I was a little late for dinner that night, and when I entered the saloon the company was already seated. Here and there at the tables there were a few gaps, owing to several of the passengers preferring to dine on shore, and I was somewhat disturbed to see that both Zavertal's and "General Waldo's" chairs were empty.

In view of my approaching interview with Vizard, I was particularly anxious to see and consult Kennard, the more so as the verification of his prophecy that I should hear more of the stowaway within forty-eight hours, seemed to indicate that he understood far better than I what was going on. Though he had no knowledge of Vizard, he must have foreseen that the stowaway would come round from Barcelona to Genoa by rail, and make another attempt to board the ship.

Without in any degree shaking my conviction as to his identity, one fact with regard to Vizard filled me with a sense of the difficulty of the task before me. He seemed to be well-known to at least a dozen of the passengers, and from the remarks made by some of those near me, I gathered that he was an enormously wealthy man, and quite a personage in London society. This made no difference to my intention to have it out with him after dinner. He had pointed a pistol at my boat's crew, and he had threatened me personally—eccentricities, which, so long as I commanded the ship, I did not mean to go unpunished, no matter how powerful the perpetrator; but I foresaw that his popularity and position might place serious obstacles in the way of getting rid of him.

If he denied having come aboard as a stowaway, people would be more likely to believe him than me; while, if he admitted it lightly, as having been done as a practical joke, I would probably be expected to pass it over. And that was just what I would rather chuck up the command than do.

During dinner I watched Vizard closely as he chatted easily with a London banker and his wife, next whom he had secured a seat, on the ground of previous acquaintance. He gave me the impression of having an iron will, and his face, in repose, I thought would be a cruel one, but, as it always appeared to be covered with a stereotyped "Society" smile, I had no chance of fathoming its capacity of expression. I was glad that he sat at the other table, and that I was not called upon to converse with him, for once or twice I caught him eyeing me in a way that was almost a challenge. Indeed, it seemed as if he were actually courting recognition, so obviously did he seek to meet my gaze.

As soon as the saloon was cleared, instead of joining the passengers on deck, I went straight to my room, and, ringing up my own steward, sent him to ascertain whether either Doctor Zavertal or "General Waldo" or both had returned to the ship. In each case the answer was in the negative. Without a moment's hesitation, for the man's covertly, defiant bearing in the saloon had put my back up, I despatched the steward to Vizard with "Captain Forrester's compliments, and he would be glad if he would come to the Captain's room." Then I sat down and waited, full of righteous indignation, and determined to command my own ship.

In less than two minutes there was a tap at the door and

Vizard stepped into the cabin. His smile had vanished, leaving his face very hard and stern; but though he looked alertly expectant he showed no traces of the surprise which a passenger suddenly summoned to the Captain's cabin in such a high-handed way would naturally have felt if ignorant of the cause. This strengthened me in the accusation I was going to make, and I spoke with confidence.

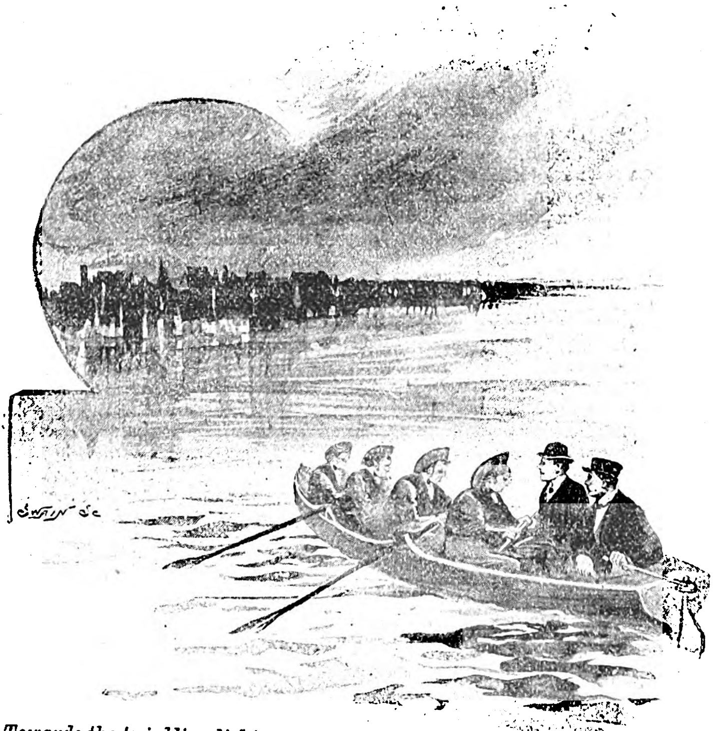
"I have sent for you, Mr. Vizard," I said, "because I recognised you the moment you came on board this evening. What do you mean by shipping as a stowaway, and then, when I land you as such, by threatening my crew and myself with a revolver?"

"It is always open to a man to place his own constructions on the actions of another," was the reply, spoken sneeringly, which almost took my breath away. It was tantamount to an admission, and his manner had nothing of the practical joker about it. I felt that whatever his motive had been, whatever his schemes were, that they had been conceived and carried out in grim earnest.

"And the constructions that I put upon your conduct, sir, are such that I decline to take you as a passenger," I replied hotly. "The steward shall render you every assistance, but a boat will be ready to take you and your baggage ashore in fifteen minutes."

The notice to quit was received with a sarcastic bow. "It has not dawned upon you, my worthy Captain, that the constructions which your owners may put upon your conduct in forcibly landing a passenger whom they have contracted to carry, may cause them to dispense with your services?" he said.

"Hang the owners!" I retorted; and I remembered afterwards the curious smile with which he heard the expletive. "If you can settle it that way with them, do so by all means. I wouldn't sail under owners who would back up a masquerading mountebank of a stowaway—no matter what his position—against their Captain. Come, sir, you'd best go and see to your things. The boat will be manned and ready on the port side in ten minutes, now."



Towards the twinkling lights of the city.

"Very well, I'll go," he replied, drawing himself up to his full height and turning to the door, but pausing on the threshold to say: "You alleged just now that I threatened you at Barcelona. Do you recollect the words of my threat?"

I wanted no more truck with him, so merely nodded.

"Then, speaking entirely without prejudice, you can consider those words as still in force, and as exactly defining the position," he said, as he left the cabin.

Ten minutes later I had the satisfaction of seeing him into the boat, which I took care was not manned by any of the crew who had put him ashore at Barcelona. The third mate went in charge, and I gave him a hint that he had a tough customer to deal with, and had better slip a pistol into his pocket. I was curious to see if Vizard would make any protest or explanation before the passengers, but, so far as I know, he held no communication with anyone from the time of leaving the Captain's room to that of going over the side. As the boat shot out into the darkness towards the twinkling lights of the city, he waved his hand jauntily to me and I heard him laugh.

In half an hour the boat returned, and the third officer reported that Vizard had given him no trouble whatever. He had not alluded to the circumstances under which he was being put ashore, but had chatted civilly on trifles, and had finished up by giving the boat's crew a sovereign to drink his health. On the part of such a man, this complacency struck me as ominous. Naples was our next port of call, and I determined to keep a good look out for him there.

For the moment, however, I was rid of the undesirable passenger, and I was free to turn my attention to a matter of more immediate interest. This was the non-return of Zavertal, who, when I turned in at eleven o'clock, was still absent from the ship. Kennard, also, was still on shore, but from what he had said I regarded this as merely a consequence of the Doctor's absence; and, in any case, as a passenger, he was entitled to a freedom of action which was hardly the privilege of an officer paid to discharge medical duties. To my mind, the Doctor's conduct in spending the night on shore without leave constituted, to say the least of it, a breach of discipline, though whether, in the peculiar organisation sanctioned by the owners, he would consider it so, was doubtful.

In the morning he was still absent, and at ten o'clock I had heard nothing of him or of his "shadow," though they were both aware that the ship was to proceed on her voyage at noon. Another half-hour passed, and I was thinking of sending on shore to the Hotel de Genes, which Zavertal had mentioned as the place of meeting with his friend, when a shoreboat came alongside, bringing a letter addressed to me in his handwriting. Tearing it open, I read as follows:

British Consulate,
Genoa,
June 24th, 18—.

Dear Captain Forrester,

I am detained here in an extremely awkward dilemma, from which your presence can alone extricate me.

May I beg of you on receipt of this to come ashore at once to the Consulate, where you will find me anxiously awaiting you. The affair will not take long to settle, and there is no reason why the sailing of the ship should be delayed if you act at once.

Yours respectfully,
Lucius Zavertal.

There was only one thing to be done, and that was to go and get him out of pawn, whatever his trouble might be, or, failing that, to secure the services of another medical officer. For a pleasure-cruiser with between two and three hundred people on board, many of them considering themselves invalids, to put to sea without a doctor would be an impossibility. The boat that had brought the letter was still alongside, and I decided to go in her in preference to waiting while my gig was manned. After informing the chief-officer of the contents of Zavertal's letter I put a sum of money in my pocket in case of need, and went towards the boat. On my way along the deck I met Aline, and told her that I was going to fetch the Doctor, who had been detained by business on shore.

"I wish you would leave him behind, then, Cyril," she said. "I cannot bear that man."

"Why—what has he been doing?" I asked, in some surprise, for I had noticed that Zavertal had been particularly civil and deferential to her and Mrs. Brinkworth.

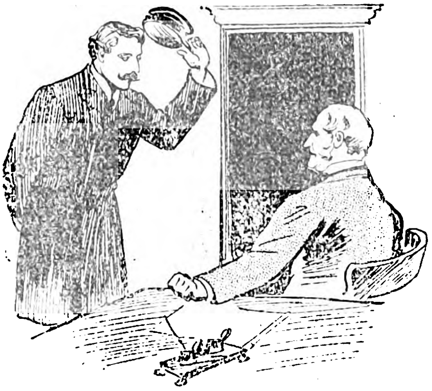
"Oh, nothing very much; only he is always pestering me to take his medicines when I am perfectly well, and don't require them," she replied.

This piece of information was so new, and moreover fitted in so compactly with the horrid thought that had crossed my mind as to Zavertal's possible reasons for mentioning the three "serious cases" that it occupied me all the way to the landing-place. Taken in conjunction with the Doctor's strange detention at the Consulate, the only conclusion I could deduce from it was that Kennard had made some important discovery which had warranted his applying to the authorities; but how Zavertal could suppose that I should be either willing or able to liberate him under such circumstances was beyond my understanding.

The two nimble Italian boatmen made short work of the distance, and I was soon walking across the Piazza Cavour to the Consulate. From my early studies of detective literature I had half expected to see Kennard hanging about the door in his disguise, but he was nowhere visible. Only the usual stream of ships' captains, seamen, and merchants' clerks jostled each other going and coming through the swing-doors leading into the waiting-room of one of the busiest consulates in Europe. On my entrance I wrote my name and business so far as it was describable on a slip, and gave it to an attendant, who vanished with it into another room, to return almost immediately with the welcome news that the Consul would see me at once. A moment later I was ushered into the presence of Her Majesty's representative.

My first impulse on entering was to look round for Zavertal, but a glance showed that there was no one in the private room besides the Consul himself, seated at his desk, and a clerk writing at a side table. Curbing my surprise, I pulled myself together in time to return the official's salutation.

"You have called, Captain Forrester, in consequence of a communication from your medical officer, I think?" the Consul said, and I remembered afterwards the look of keen inquiry with which he eyed me.



Ushered into the presence of Her Majesty's representative.

"Yes; I understood that Doctor Zavertal was here," I replied.

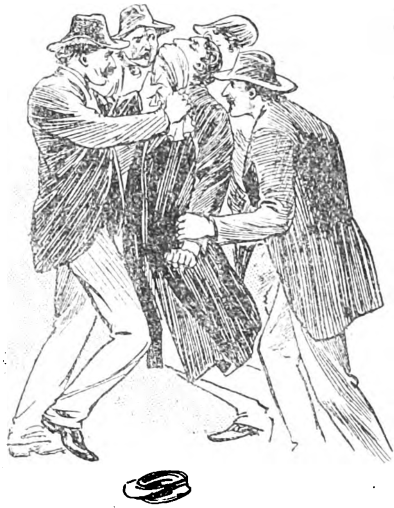
"So he is; you will see him presently," returned the Consul. "There is a matter about which I want to question you first. A gentleman, named Vizard, has been here to lodge a complaint against you, Captain, for refusing to carry him on your steamer, although he has paid his fare. He says you accused him of having been a stowaway from London to Barcelona, or something of the kind."

"And so he was, sir," I replied. "Why, he as good as admitted it last night. There is no doubt he is the same man whom I landed. If Doctor Zavertal is here, he should be able to corroborate me."

"Doctor Zavertal has already seen Mr. Vizard," said the Consul curtly. "One more question. Have you any accusation or charge to make against the Doctor?"

From the Consul's tone and manner I guessed that Zavertal had taken sides against me, by pretending to fail in recognising Vizard as Enriquez. I began to have an uneasy feeling that something had been got up for me, and this so raised my gorge that I answered rashly.

"Not exactly an accusation—at least, not yet," I blurted out. "But I believe him to be a scheming underhand scoundrel. I cannot put it in words, but I only know that the ship has been chock full of mysteries and disguises and conspiracies ever since she left port, and they can all be traced to this man."



I was violently seized by strong arms.

"Ah, that about settles it, then," said the Consul decisively. "If you will step in there, Captain, you will find that I have arrived at a practical solution of the difficulties that are worrying you."

He pointed to a baize-covered door at the opposite end of the room from that at which I had entered, and in my anxiety for a speedy settlement of the Vizard affair I made for it in all haste, my impression being that it would lead to an inner apartment where I should perhaps find the other parties to the controversy in which I was now apparently involved. Directly I opened the door I saw by a wall four feet in front of me that I was mistaken. The place in which I found myself was a narrow passage, passing the door in each direction to the right and left. Before I could note more a number of faces closed in upon me on either hand, I was violently seized by strong arms, a pungent cloth was pressed to my nostrils, and I felt myself becoming quickly powerless in mind and body.

But, as my senses left me, the last definite objects presented to my fading sight were the features of Vizard and Zavertal, standing out distinct and triumphant among the crowd of olive-skinned, unknown faces that hemmed me in on every side. Then I struggled hard, but my limbs refused to answer to my will, my ears buzzed and roared like the engines of a tramp steamer, darkness and silence swooped down upon me, and I knew no more.

CHAPTER XIII.

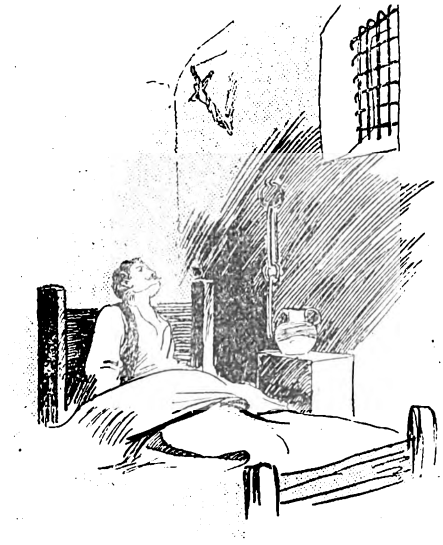
The Convent of Santa Lucia.

When I came back to consciousness I was lying on my back on a dirty bed in a stone cell some twelve feet long by six across, and my returning senses took shape slowly in the process of counting the bars in an iron grated window high up in the wall at my side. How long I had lain there I had no means of knowing. A stray sunbeam flickering through the dusty glass of the window told me that it was daytime, and that was all. As recollection grew upon me, I moved my limbs to see if I was bound, and I rejoiced in a dim and misty sort of way to find that within the narrow compass of my prison at least I was free.

But that was the extent of my self-gratulation. When I remembered the scene at the Consulate, and the manner of my forcible capture, I gnashed my teeth with impotent fury to think that Zavertal and Vizard, about whose co-operation there could no longer be any doubt, had bested me with such ease. Whatever their objects might be, they had evidently seen that I was hostile and suspicious, and they had got me deposed from the command by some ruse by which the Consul had been made the unconscious abettor of their villainy. By this time the *Queen of Night* had probably proceeded on her voyage in charge of another captain, and the thought maddened me that Aline was on board, ignorant or misinformed of what had befallen me, and with those two unscrupulous villains at hand free to carry out whatever devilry was in their minds.

These considerations quite outweighed the disgust I felt at the treatment to which I had been subjected, but after a while I began to wonder what colourable pretext my enemies could have offered to the Consul to induce him to sanction their conduct. Of course I never doubted that he had been duped; but a terribly strong case must have been presented to him, I thought, for him to permit violence to be used against a British subject within the walls of the Consulate. With what crime was I charged? Again, however heinous that crime might be, why that extraordinary method of arrest? I had no previous experience of Italian justice, but I could not believe that it was usual to chloroform prisoners in order to make them "go quietly."

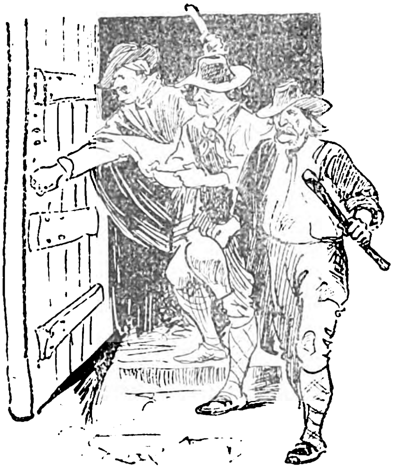
My mind having cleared sufficiently to reason thus, the impulse took me to try and ascertain whether I was really in prison or no. The place of my confinement certainly warranted no other supposition. The walls and floor were of stone, the door massive and nail-studded, and the window was placed so high that its lattice of iron bars could only have been intended to prevent escape, not accident. Having no means of filing the bars, flight by that route was out of the question, but I thought that by standing on the bed and making an upward spring it was just possible that I might reach the inner sill of the window, and hang on long enough to obtain a view of the outside surroundings.



I was lying on my back on a dirty bed.

At the second attempt I was successful. My fingers got a grip on the stone sill, and, by dint of pulling up my own weight, I managed to raise my head sufficiently high to look out. I saw an old and tangled garden surrounded by stone walls, and with nothing more human-like in it than here and there a broken statue peeping through the matted undergrowth. The paths and terraces were moss-grown and uncared for. Beyond the far boundary wall the ground sloped upwards, and I could see that it was quite country, and only sparsely studded with large houses at considerable intervals.

Having noted that my window was about twenty feet from the ground, I dropped back into my cell, the wiser only by the negative theory that my place of confinement was not a prison. The neglected condition of the garden precluded the idea that the place was a Government establishment of any kind, and the situation tended to prove that it was not the gaol. I judged from the country beyond the walls that I was somewhere on the rising foothills at the back of the city, whereas the gaol was in the central and thickly built-over district of the Via Garibaldi. Such were the thoughts that were running through my mind.



Three stalwart Italians.

Further reflection was cut short by the sound of approaching footsteps followed by the clanking of bolts and chains. A moment later the door opened, admitting three stalwart Italians, whose appearance at once put an end to any lingering notion that I might be in a legal prison. If I had been held captive by brigands in a mountain fastness I could not have had guardians who more thoroughly looked the part than the greasy, ragged, garlic-smelling rascals who crowded into the narrow cell.

They all carried oak cudgels, which, judging from the ferocious glances they shot at me, they would use with very little provocation. Separately I could have easily tackled any one of them, but the number put all idea of attacking them out of my head at once, especially as I did not know how many of the same sample might be within beck and call.

One fellow carried a bowl of stew, and another a stone jar half filled with country wine. These they deposited on the floor, one of them saying, with a gesture:

"Deener—Signor eat deener."

This denoted a modified knowledge of English, and I at once broke into a torrent of protest and inquiry—where was I, why had I been so treated, was I free to go away?

At the last question the spokesman laughed, and answered the first question as though it comprised a reply to the others:

"This the Convent—the Convent of Santa Lucia," he said.

This conveyed nothing, and when I pressed him further he refused to say why I had been brought there and in whose keeping I was. The only piece of information he vouchsafed increased my anxiety and dismay. On my demanding to be taken instantly to the British Consul, the man replied insolently:

"Consul come here see Signor in one week. No use making fuss before."

"Is there anyone named Zavertal, or Vizard, in this confounded place?" I asked.

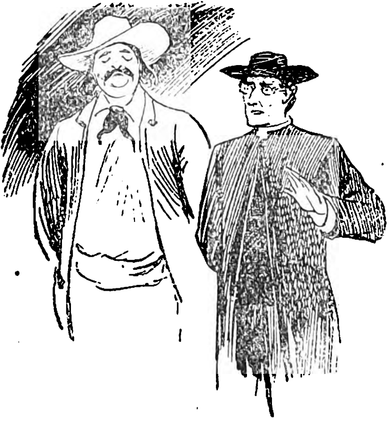
But he only shook his head vacantly, and, again pointing to the wretched food, withdrew with his companions, bolting the door behind them. I was too excited to be hungry, but, recognising the necessity of preserving my strength, I ate some of the mess and drank all the wine, after which I sat down on the bed—not to despair, but to think out some way of escape. That my capture was in some degree sanctioned by authority I concluded from the man's statement that the Consul would visit me in a week.

That was so far reassuring, as showing that I was not in the hands of professed criminals, but it also spurred me to endeavour to free myself, seeing that the only person who could help me would not be accessible for seven long weary days. To remain shut up for that time, in doubt as to what those two scheming villains were up to, and with that ever-haunting fear about Aline hanging over me, was not what I meant to endure.

I had sat there brooding for an hour or more, when again I heard the tramp of approaching footsteps. On the door being opened two people—both strangers to me—came in, while outside were clustered the three men whom I had seen before. The two men who entered were quite of a different stamp, and my heart bounded when I saw that one of them was dressed in the garb of an English clergyman. His companion was a big, lank-haired Italian, elderly and of pompous manners; but he had the air of being a person of education, and in authority. He seemed to search my face with a keen scrutiny, and then falling back a pace or two he said a few words in Italian as he motioned his companion forward.

The clergyman was spare and ascetic-looking, and he proceeded to address me in an irritating, unctuous voice. "I am the new English chaplain here," he said. "Need I say with what heartiness I shall place my ministrations and advice at your disposal. I have called to see you in the exercise of my duty at the special request of the Consul."

"You are very kind," I replied—in, I fear, a thank-you-for-nothing tone, "but I should prefer to see the Consul himself. The only service anyone can render me at present is to tell me why I am detained in this hole, and to get me out of it as quickly as is possible."



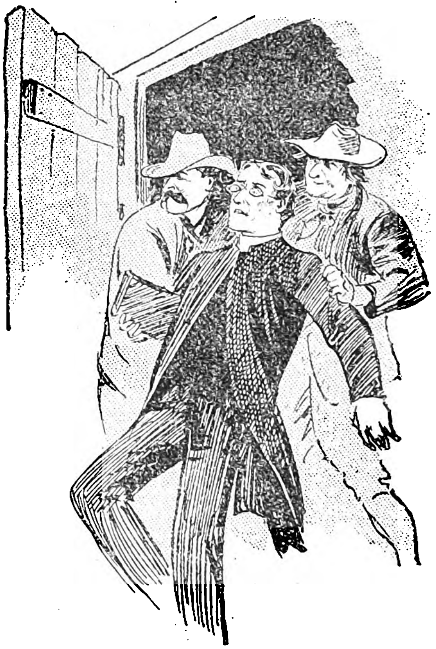
The two men who entered were of quite a different stamp.

The clergyman sighed a professional sigh. "Those are matters that are quite beyond my province, I am afraid," he whined in the nauseous hypocritical twang that was fast making me hate him. "Any spiritual consolation, now? Or the loan of a nice book to read? In either of those ways I shall be so privileged to administer to your wants."

In the doorway the pompous authoritative person, evidently ignorant of English, was having our conversation mutilated to him by the greasy tatterdemalion who had a smattering. The man's whispering, therefore, overlapped the last sentence by twenty seconds, and under cover of this the parson, catching my eye, added quickly, whispering himself with great earnestness:—

"I am here to help you. Appear angry and drive me away, but take the book I shall offer you."

With difficulty controlling my delight sufficiently to seize the cue, I reviled him so vigorously for an unsympathetic humbug, unwilling to aid a fellow-countryman in distress, that the translator threw up his hands in despair. The effect upon the clergyman was even more marked. Uttering feeble protests, he retreated to the door, where he nearly fell into the arms of the Italians who rallied to his assistance. But checking the onslaught they seemed about to make upon me, he ventured back a little way into the cell and laid upon the bed a book which he had been carrying under his arm. This being safely accomplished, he beat a second retreat, pulling the door to after him, and then I heard the bolts shot and the footsteps of my visitors departing.



He retreated to the door.

The moment the sounds died away I sprang up and clutched the book, which was a rather bulky volume, bound in cloth, with red edges. Directly my fingers closed upon it I knew that it was no book, but a dummy, forming a box, of which one of the covers was the lid. Wrenching it open, I could hardly repress a cry of exultation, for neatly packed in the interior was a silken cord, slight, but strong enough to bear the weight of a man's body, a file, a small chisel, and a half-sheet of note-paper, on which were scrawled the following welcome lines:

"Zavertal has been too clever for us, but I shall beat him yet. In case you do not know, you are in the Convent of Santa Lucia, which is used as a private mad-house. I bring you means of escape. Make the attempt to-night, an hour after sunset. I shall wait for you at the right-hand angle of the far garden wall, outside. The ship has sailed, with McIntyre in command, but if you get away to-night we can pick her up at Naples. No time to write more, as I have to devise means of getting to you somehow. Explanations when we meet. "Kennard."

(*To be continued.*)

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THE MISERY OF CORPULENCY

A copy has come to hand of the just issued 18th edition of Mr. F. Cecil Russell's "Corpulency, and the Cure" (256 pages), the clever little volume which, more than anything else, has brought a revolution in the treatment of obesity. That the still larger circulation implied by the issue of the new edition of this popular work is necessary is proved by such a paragraph as the following. It appears among the answers to correspondents in the "Dress and Fashion" column of a Sunday newspaper with a large circulation: "Miserable.—A young girl of 18 ought not to have such a large stomach that no dress looks well. Perhaps you require exercise and dieting." The helpless vagueness of this reply to a young girl who is naturally "miserable" on account of her unseemly obesity is a sufficient evidence that Mr. Russell does well in seeking to make known, even more widely than they are at present, the simplicity, the efficiency, the rapidity, and the delightful surroundings of his treatment for the reduction of superabundant fat. The young girl in question, who might exercise and diet herself for months without any appreciable improvement, may easily learn to imitate the example of thousands of ladies of all ages, who, by the use of Mr. Russell's pure vegetable preparation, have reduced their weight at the rate of pounds per week, and sometimes (but only when necessary, for the working of the cure is virtually automatic, stopping its effects when the normal limit is reached) stones per month. She may acquire this open secret—for the author makes no mystery about the ingredients of his recipe, by sending six penny stamps to Mr. Russell's offices, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., when a copy of the book will be sent post free. If she follows his instructions, "Miserable," without any fasting regimen, and without excessive exercise, will find herself being quickly reduced to shapely proportions, with an improved appetite, and full liberty to gratify it.

LONGEVITY AND CORPULENCY.

We have received a copy of the just issued 18th edition of Mr. F. Cecil Russell's "Corpulency, and the Cure" (Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.). This issue is in itself indicative of the widespread influence which the author now exercises as a successful expert in the treatment of obesity, while the additions to the evidence which, as a statistician, he is in the habit of collecting on the subject are suggestive of some curious reflections. It is evident that Mr. Russell is annually treating thousands of cases of excessive fat with a success which, in the rapidity and the permanence of its manifestation is truly marvellous. That the enormous popularity of his system is likely to increase in the future is most probable, because it is free from all the drawbacks which have rendered the Banting and other methods of reducing corpulence unacceptable to the majority of the sufferers, who have regarded these cures as rather worse than the complaint. By attacking the causes rather than the symptoms of obesity, he strengthens the digestive organs, thus actually increasing, instead of decreasing, the appetite, while the surplus weight is being reduced at a wonderfully rapid rate, amounting to pounds per week, and often stones per month. Add to this that there is no mystery about the nature of the absolutely innoculous preparation, the recipe for which Mr. Russell supplies in his capital little volume (256 pages), which may be obtained post free by sending six penny stamps to the author's offices, at the address given above. It seems certain, therefore, that, as a result of the happy revolution which the patient research of this specialist, with the aid of a distinguished physician as a collaborateur, has effected, the average of longevity will, before long, be appreciably raised. Obesity is, indeed, one of the few antagonistic influences remaining which, especially among the more prosperous classes, prevent the great majority of people of both sexes becoming centenarians. With advanced ideas in regard to wholesome food, clothing, and sanitary arrangements, it only remains to get rid of clogging fat to live an ideally hygienic, and therefore, a very prolonged life.

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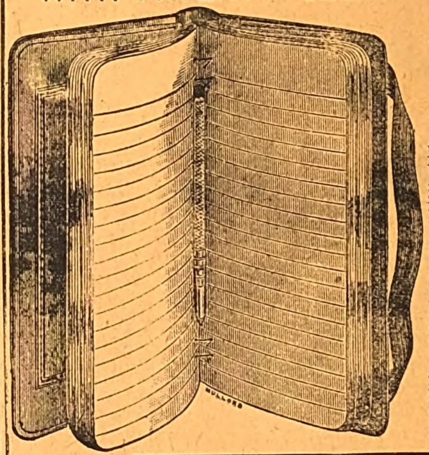

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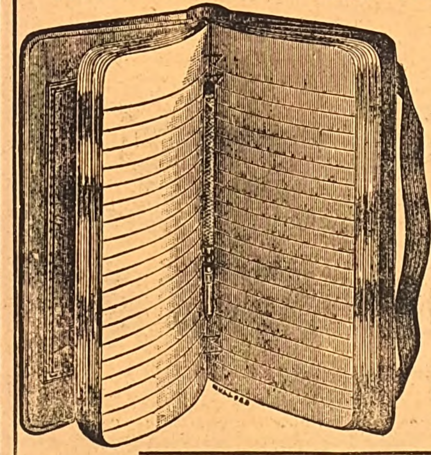

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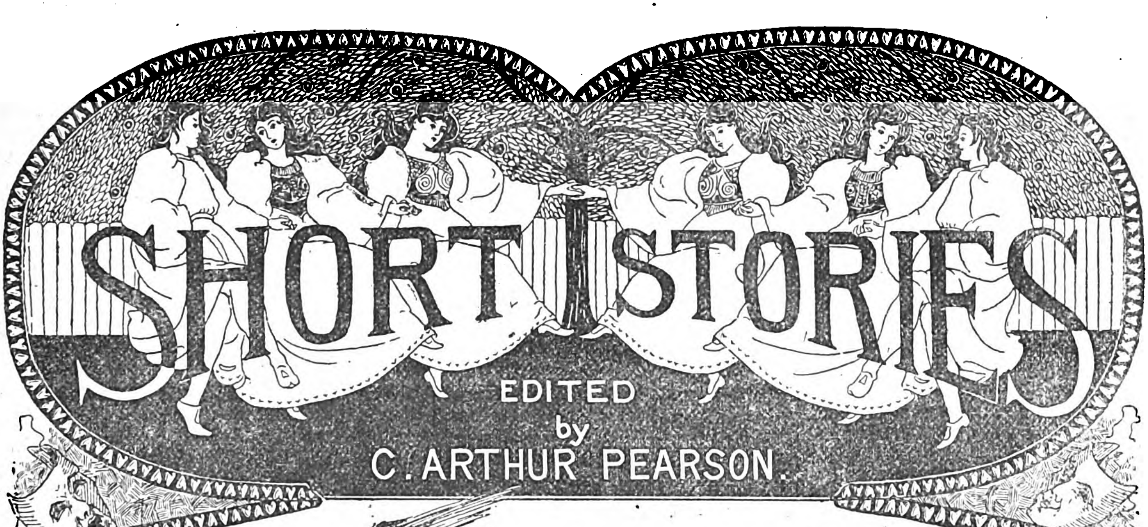
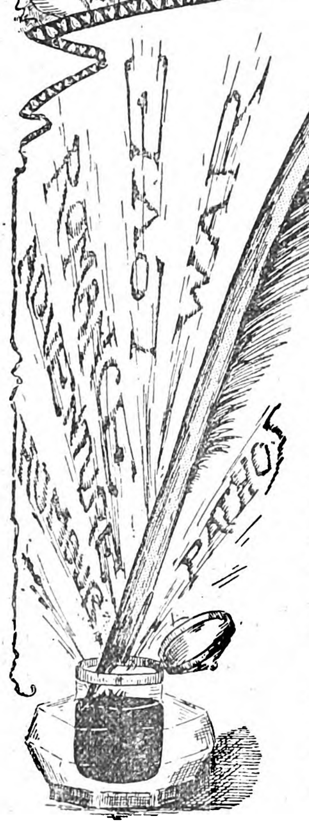

SHORT STORIES
EDITED by C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 357. [One Penny.

For the Week ending November 2nd, 1895.



His Story—and Mine.

I.

It was before ill days had fallen and the troopships were taken from Portsmouth.

Otherwise, counting by years, it was not so very long ago.

The *Malabar* had been in just four hours. The people I had grown used to having about me on the voyage were making quick departures, leaving me alone.

In the bustle, now and then, someone stopped to offer me a hand as he hurried away, but not often. No one pitied me. Every trooper brings back to England at least one individual of the class into which I had been counted; this time I chanced to be that individual. It did not matter much. After people have made half-a-dozen passages between Bombay and Portsmouth they get used to things, and do not notice. Only I could have laughed at them sometimes. I was the supposed victim of a "touch of sun."

Always—in India—when a man lets a story into his life, and it gets the better of him, they put it down to a touch of sun. This never varies. It covers nearly all the vagaries of life you meet with after the Suez Canal.

I was pacing to and fro along the jetty, thinking my story all out again, chapter by chapter, when presently a hand touched me, and old Matthews was lugging me back on board to the saloon fire.

I had not seen him for five years, yet it seemed quite the right thing for him to be doing. He had changed, too. It was some time before I noticed it; when I did, however, I got a shock. Matthews and I had been friends in our college days, and we were friends still, which says much for us both. The thing that had happened to me half a year previously had managed to snap every bond of faith I ever possessed in my fellow men, save this single one. I was just thinking how strange it was, when Mathews looked up and caught my gaze.

"I should fancy you never did any man an injury in your life, old fellow," I said, speaking out the thought that had grown upon me, and making him start by my abruptness.

"Some one did me an injury once, you know," I went on; "and I've got into a way of suspecting everybody I meet for it. I must run across him sooner or later. I feel it! And then! You shall hear all about it one day, Bob, but not now! And these fools call it a touch of sun. Ask any of them, and they'll tell you I'm wrong in my head. But you, Bob, you're different, old man, and," I added, "I'd trust you to the end of all things, Bob."

For a moment we sat looking into each other's eyes across the fire. And then Matthews spoke. Something in what I had said had turned him a shade paler under his deep, dark brown. Glancing back on it now, I cannot but see how odd it was that he should have commenced that story there and then. But such things do come about.

His story—and mine!

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So strangely, strongly knitted together. I wonder if lives are eternally getting mixed in that way? I have forgiven him now—at least, I think so, I hope so. Men should learn to forgive as women do. Let us hasten on, though, while in the mood. I feel I can write it all to-night.

I have been told that if two men, who knew each other long before either ever graced a gazette, part one morning on the Portsmouth jetty, and then meet again suddenly after five years, there is nearly always a tale to unfold. That was his—and mine.

I do not know how he began. He was speaking excitedly, though cautiously. I took up the thread somewhere here:

"I had a decent long spell of the hills, you know, Jack," he said. "Then one morning I got word to hurry down, and I was brute enough to complain.

"But it was as low-lying, unhealthy, God-forsaken a hole as ever existed; and just a week after my arrival they dragged the first cholera case into hospital, and my work began.

"How the curse got in amongst us from the native bazaar we never knew, for that den had been placed out of bounds three weeks earlier on suspicion.

"But there it was, looking as ugly as anything you like to think of. And though we soon had a marquee out on the cholera camp, and were ready to do our best, we saw that it was little use to hope for a great deal. It was too late!

"The rains were out of season, you remember, and the heat was horrible.

"Little Marden—poor lad!—who had breakfasted with us in the best of spirits, was buried before sundown, and another followed about midnight.

"The next morning saw a second marquee alongside the first. Nothing like plenty of room, we told ourselves. But the real crowding began some days later, when, to make things ghastlier, the panic started to take a hold, and one or two went down out of sheer fright.

"Jack——" Matthews broke off to touch my hand. "God alone knows how we got through it! There was no time to get the women and children clear. We were put in quarantine that first night; you understand what that means.

"The work was awful! There was no one to help. We wanted a woman or two, but you know me! I wouldn't take the men's wives, even to nurse each other. One or two offered, poor souls; I sent them back to their husbands and the kiddies. I haven't the stain of that on my life, any way!

"Things were getting worse, and were likely to be worse.

"At every turn it was the one cry: 'If only we had a single pair of extra willing hands.' And then *she* came.

"It was as I was leaving the tents one evening, to get an hour's rest before the horrible night should begin, when her little fingers touched my sleeve in the blistering sunset; and I heard her telling me, in her quick, quiet way, that she was a nurse, and had come to help.

"Jack, you don't know what that week made of me!

"Just then I saw nothing of how young and frail she was, what a mere child. She looked so brave standing there in the red glow of evening. And I only knew how badly we wanted someone, and that someone had come, and was used to sickness and death.

"I summed it all up as calmly and coolly as though she were just a partner I was selecting for a game of tennis.

"She was different from the other women. There were no little ones. She wasn't married. She told me about herself. Her father had died in Simla a year before, from a polo accident, and she had been nursing a Parsee's invalid daughter—that was all. I never dreamt of refusing her.

"That night the panic spirit was laid again, the poor beggars were behaving like gentlemen. She divided her time amongst the children and men. I think it was a big hulking lad of a recruit who christened her by the name we all learnt to know so well. He called her 'Camp Angel.' And Camp Angel she remained till the end."

II.

He paused for breath.

I looked across at the white face, so altered from the old days, and wondered where the story would leave off for him. Poor Bob! And though his narrative thus far fitted somewhat vaguely with what had made such a wreck of me, I rose above the temptation, and would not doubt him yet.

"I needn't go on telling you the progress from day to day," he began again. "It just went worse and worse! Heavens, what a scourge!

"The heat was direful, the water running down till only a few pints were left in the bottom of the wells to reflect back the ferns growing on the sides. Morning by morning the sun rose scorching, with no hope of rain or relief. And evening saw it setting in a flame of livid fire. Camp Angel remained brave through it all. Dear, faithful little soul.

"About this time I noticed how fragile our little angel was, and the discovery caused me a bitter half hour. The first pangs of the sorrow which had since filled my days came as I, for a brief moment, allowed my thoughts to travel on ahead. But I drew up; after all, she was used to the sight of sickness and suffering, and I wanted her, I could not spare her. Thus I argued, and endeavoured to stifle the pity growing up in my heart for the sweet, patient, wee face. The most wonderful thing about that grand little woman was her patience.

"One hot, sultry evening I came upon her," he proceeded, "sitting outside a tent, a dying child on her lap.

"She looked up as I approached.

"'Tired?' she asked, with one of her rare, glorious smiles. 'Oh, if only the rains would come!' she added, and the prayer was in her eyes.

"The rains did come at last, they had to," he told me grimly. "But they were seven weeks late! Jack, you know the plains pretty well. Imagine, then, what we suffered for want of water during one of the hottest seasons that could be remembered! Cholera is bad enough, yet the other is worse, I think. The torture is longer, more harrowing, consequently.

"The rains came, I say. And never shall I forget the first shower. How it poured! A few hungering men and women stood and watched, and caught some drops feverishly in their hands, as though jealous lest the parched land should receive them all.

"The cholera began to abate. There were fewer cases, more recoveries.

"We returned to mess; a mere handful of gaunt, pale, tired wretches. We talked little of the scourge at first. Because it still occupied our thoughts, you see; and none of us were sure, even yet.

"Jack, so far this has been no uncommon story. Such things happen over and over again in India, and the outside world hears little of it all. But the end—that is far above the commonplace—far, far above. It concerns Camp Angel now—Camp Angel, and myself, and another fellow.

"Some day I may find him, and win forgiveness for the cruel emptiness I caused in his life. Yet I was not all to blame, surely? And I suffered terribly! Besides, I never could foresee anything, never. You know it, Jack. And the cholera scare had dazed, bewildered me!

"Don't glare at me like that, old man!" he exclaimed irritably. "You fancied just now that I had never injured a fellow—but not you, old friend, thank Heaven, not you!"

His words hurt me, yet I allowed him to rattle on. It never occurred to me to cry "Stop!" Why should I? Best hear it out to the bitter end, and then——

People were constantly passing through the saloon now. Neither of us heeded. Each was intent on a story. His and mine. He remembering and telling it. I listening for the details which had hitherto puzzled me entirely. How he talked. I had never suspected Matthews of any latent dramatic talent. Looking back on it to-night, when miles of cold sea divide us and I have forgiven him, I wonder why his recital of our story did not surprise me. But my mind was working out another problem, and I sat sternly silent while he told me of Camp Angel's illness.

"The first I heard of it, old man," he said, "was one night, when Mrs. James sent me a hasty note.

"'Come and see Camp Angel,' she wrote. 'She is dying! You have overworked her!'

"Dying! Overworked! I had overworked her! It was a mad dream! I tried to wake from it! But no! The words were before me, eating like quick fire into my brain!

"'She is dying! You have overworked her!'

"Ah, Jack lad, it is something to have the mark of that to carry to one's grave! Only my wild desire to relieve the pain of the children had made me take her. And now she, too, was going!

"The distance seemed interminable. I believe I must have walked very slowly, despite the fact that the monsoons were doing their level best to form continuous sheets of water along the roads.

"'You are drenched,' Mrs. James said, when I at last reached her bungalow.

"I know not what I answered her. It is long ago, old fellow. At least, I forget. I only walked past her, and entered the room I knew Camp Angel had occupied since she went to stay with her dead mother's friend, Major James' wife.

"Must I tell you, Jack?" he asked. "Yet why not? when you have already heard so much. Must I tell you that she was dying, and—that—I—loved—her! Why, man, what is the matter?"

III.

We were glaring at each other; he wondering what had come to me; I instinctively pitying him, and persuading myself that as he had ruined my life, he had likewise ruined his own.

"What is it, Jack?" he repeated.

"Nothing," I said sharply. "Finish the story quickly, Bob. I am waiting for the end."

"But——"

"Finish it," I interrupted sharply.

"You might almost guess the rest," he murmured, speaking very slowly, in strange contrast to his recent excited tones.

"She lay there all through that night," he went on. "I remained, doing what little I could to relieve her great suffering.

"Jack, I loved her, and she was going out of my life for ever. Towards morning she grew quieter, and looked at me with one of her splendid smiles. Brave little soul! She would die like that, smiling divinely, as though this world had been a very fair place for her; but the other—if there is one—would be infinitely fairer.

"The window let the first streak of the dawning day into the little room. All was quiet, for the rain had ceased some hours since, and Mrs. James had gone to get some rest.

"Camp Angel would recover, she thought. I knew better, and for that reason I told her of my love, Jack; for that reason. Her life might have been saved had I seen from the beginning how delicate she was, and that the infernal heat was killing her. But you understand, Jack, I kept her near me on the plains till it was too late. She died with the other's name on her lips, breathing it so faintly that I could not hear. Yes, Jack, Camp Angel had been betrothed to another, and she loved him dearly. He was far, far away, she said, but he would have come had he known.

"Jack, if ever I meet him, and tell him as I have told you, do you think he might forgive?"

"What could his forgiveness mean to you?" I asked harshly. "You have spoiled his life. She is dead, and the dead are lost to us till we die, too, and find them in the other world we dream of. What was her name?"

"Camp Angel."

"No, no; her true name?"

"Dulce Manning."

"Bob, he may forgive in the days to come; he may."

"May, old friend!" he repeated, in a hurt kind of way. "Say he will, Jack, just to please a fellow."

"I cannot. Bob, I am the other, the man you have injured; the one man your Camp Angel loved on God's earth. Dulce, Dulce! When you came aboard an hour ago I believed only in you; now, now——"

"Jack," he interrupted, "I'm sorry, old friend, very, very sorry; but the past is past, and we are helpless."

He left me sitting over the fire still, and went away into the dark night alone.

We have never met since. When he reads this he will know that I have forgiven at last, and perhaps return.

I hope so.

H. Yates.

GOLDEN STAR

A ROMANCE

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

On the eve of the fall of the Inca empire Vilcaroya marries Golden Star, and with her drinks a potion, the result of which is a death-like trance, in hope of fulfilling the prophecy that the empire shall be restored by one who has come alive from the grave. Three hundred and sixty years later Professor Lamson brings, as he thinks, Vilcaroya's mummy from Peru to England. His friend Djama believes that he can restore it to life, and does so. Six months later the party return to Peru, Ruth, Djama's sister, going with them. At Panama they meet Hartness, a friend of Lamson's, who joins in the expedition. Arrived in Cuzco, Vilcaroya put himself into communication with the remnant of his people, and prepares to begin his work. He summons one Tupac-Rayca to meet him with twenty others of the old Inca blood on the Rodadero, a plain behind the great fortress. The same night at dinner he accidentally reveals the fact that Golden Star was his sister as well as his wife. It is explained to him that such a union as this is impossible in the modern world. Later on the same night he entices Djama on to the Rodadero and bids his men blindfold him. He then leads them by a way of which he only knows the secret into the Hall of Gold, a subterranean chamber in which some of the treasures of the Incas are hidden, where he dresses himself in the imperial robes, and then, seated on a throne, he receives the oath of allegiance from Tupac and his comrades. He shows Djama the treasures, and promises to load him with them if he will restore Golden Star to life, and threatens him with death if he reveals what he has seen. After this he has some of the gold taken to their lodgings, and with part of this buys a convenient hacienda in the country, and in due course they set out for the resting-place of Golden Star. When the cavern in which her body is lying has been opened by Vilcaroya and he sees that it is still undisturbed, he takes Ruth in alone with him, and in Golden Star she finds the dead image of herself, save that the Inca Princess has golden hair while hers is black.

CHAPTER XV.

TO LIVE OR DIE?

I CANNOT tell you of what followed the taking of the body of Golden Star back to the hacienda, for neither I nor any of the others, saving only Djama himself, witnessed the secret mysteries of his strange and fearful art. I could tell you of their wonder when, after I had bidden Tupac bring the case into the cavern and he and I and Joyful Star had gently and reverently raised her from her couch and laid her in it, we carried her out into the daylight. How they stood around the open case and looked, half in wonder and half in fear, from her dead cold face to the living likeness that was bending over it. How they praised her beauty and marvelled at the forgotten arts that had preserved so perfect a likeness of life in one who for more than three centuries and a half had neither drawn breath nor known a moment of feeling.

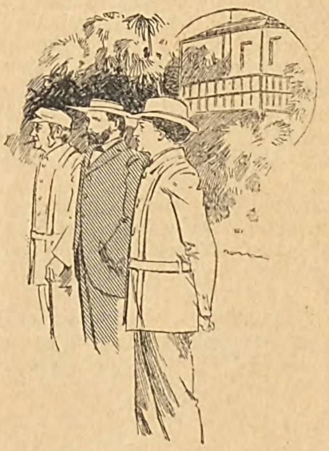
I could tell you, too, with what loving and anxious care that precious burden was borne over plain and valley and mountain in a litter that we had brought with us for the purpose, and how at last we laid her in all her calm, unconscious loveliness on the great table which stood in the middle of the chamber in which Djama was to do his work. But here my story must cease for the time, for Djama made it an unalterable condition that he should do the work that only he could do in absolute solitude. Only thus, he said, would he, or could he, perform the task upon whose issue the completion of Golden Star's life on earth, if it was ever to be completed, absolutely depended.

He told us plainly that a single interruption should be fatal to her and all our hopes. He would not even permit his sister to enter the room until he should call for her. I was bitterly loath to yield—to leave her who had been so dear to me powerless and unconscious in the hands of a man whom I had already learned to hate, although not only did I owe my own new life to him, but on him alone rested all my hopes of seeing Golden Star once more restored to life and health and the beauty that had been peerless before Joyful Star had reached the perfection of her young womanhood.

How did I know what unholy arts he might use to rekindle the long quenched life-flame in that fair shape of hers? How could I do more than guess vaguely and fearfully at the awful mysteries that might be enacted in the silence and solitude of that vast closed chamber in which, day and night, he would remain alone with her, the living with the dead, like the potter with his clay, until it should please him to use the dreadful power that was his, and call her back from death to life, perhaps—and oh! how horrible the thought was to me!—to be the slave of the man who, by his unearthly art, had made himself the master of her new life.

Yet think of it, brood over it, as I would, there was no help for it. He and he alone could exert the power that would loose the bonds of death in which she lay enchained. Unless he had his will she would remain as she was, perhaps until the last day came, and the Lord of Life called all his children, living and dead, back to the Mansions of the Sun; and so we yielded, since there was nothing else to be done.

On the evening of the day that we returned to the hacienda he busied himself making the last preparations for his work. Then he came out of the room and locked the door, and, after eating his dinner almost in silence, went to bed, taking the key with him, and telling us that on no account must he be awakened. All that night and the next day, and the next night we neither saw nor heard anything of him, but the morning of the second day the door of his bedroom was open, and his bed was empty, but the door of the room in which Golden Star lay was still fast shut and locked.



We three men wandered about aimlessly.

How the time passed I cannot tell you. Joyful Star, seemingly more self-possessed than any of us, took up her household duties, and went about them with a quick, quiet industry that surprised and shamed us. But we three men wandered about aimlessly, now alone and now together, communing with our own thoughts or talking with each other always of the same thing, of what was going on in that chamber of life and death, where, as we knew from the faint sounds that every now and then came from the closed door, the master of the arts of life and death was performing his fearful task.

The first day and night came and went, then the second, and still the door remained closed, and Djama gave no sign. But the Professor sought to comfort me and soothe our impatience by telling me how long the same work had lasted before I was recalled to life. I had sought also to distract my thoughts by talking with him and Francis Hartness of all that was to be done for the deliverance of my people and the realisation of my dreams of empire when Djama's task should be over.

But it was useless, for my fear and suspense kept my mind bound as though with invisible chains, and do what I would my thoughts went back and back again to dwell upon the unknown secrets of that closed and silent room. Then I tried to draw Joyful Star into conversation about the thoughts which I knew were filling both our hearts, but though she listened to me she would say nothing herself, and I soon saw that with her the subject was forbidden and the work not to be talked of till in success or failure it was ended.

For the first two nights no sleep came to my eyes, but the third night my weariness was too much for me, and scarcely had my aching head fallen on the pillow than slumber, filled with broken dreams and visions of things unutterably horrible, came upon me. In the midst of one of them, I know not what it was save that no human words could paint the horror of it, I woke up with a cold damp hand upon my shoulder, and heard Djama's voice, hoarse and trembling saying to me:

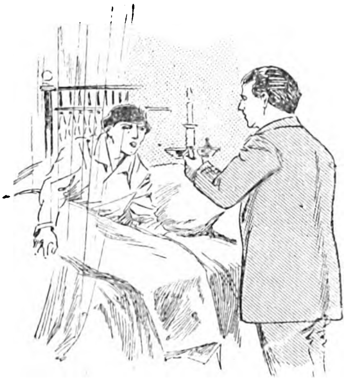
"Get up and dress, Vilcaroya, I have something for you to see and to hear. Make haste or it may be too late."

I looked up and saw him standing by my bed with a light in his hand, ghastly pale and staring at me with black burning eyes which seemed as they looked into mine to take my will a prisoner, and draw my very soul towards him.

"What is it?" I said in the broken words of one just roused from sleep. "Is it over—have you succeeded? Is she alive? Have you come to take me to her?"

"The work is not done yet," he said. "I have come for you to see it finished. Make haste, I tell you, if you want to see what you have been waiting so long for."

I needed no second bidding. I sprang out of bed and dressed myself with swift though trembling hands. Then I thrust my feet into a pair of soft slippers, such as Djama himself wore, and then I followed him from the room out on to the balcony that was built round the house over the inner courtyard. We went down into the court and into the dining-room, and through that down a long narrow passage out of which opened the room that had held all our hope and fear and wonder for so long.

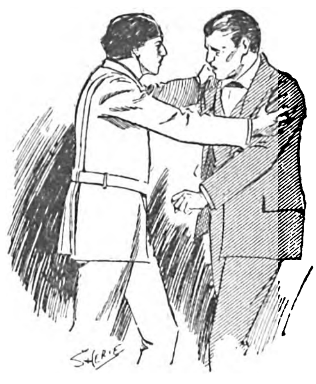


I looked up and saw him standing by my bed.

He unlocked the door and motioned to me to go in. He followed me and locked the door behind us. I looked about the room, which was dimly lit by two shaded lamps. The table where we had laid Golden Star was empty. Many strangely shaped things that I knew not the use of were scattered about. The air was hot and moist, and filled with a faint, sweet odour. At the opposite end from the door, which was covered by a screen, I saw in one corner a bath, from which white, steamy fumes were rising, and in the other stood a little narrow curtained bed, such as I had first awakened in.

Djama caught me by the arm, and half led, half dragged me to the bedside Then with his other hand he parted the curtains and pointed to the pillow. I felt his burning eyes fixed upon me as I looked and saw the sweet, fair face of Golden Star, lying in the midst of her gold-brown tresses, which lay spread out on the pillow, cleansed from the dust of the grave, and soft and shimmering as silk.

I started forward, and with my face close to hers, scanned every feature, and listened, but in vain, for the soft sound of her breathing. Her skin was clear and moist; I could see the thin blue veins in her eyelids, and the moisture on her lips. I laid my hand gently on her cheek. It was soft and smooth, but still cold as death.



Seized Djama by the shoulders.

Then a fierce, unreasoning anger came into my heart. I sprang back and seized Djama by the shoulders, and looking with fierce hot eyes into his, I whispered hoarsely:

"Have you brought me here to mock me? She is not alive—she is but a fair image of death. Tell me that you have failed and I will strangle you, liar and cheat that you are."

He looked back steadily into my eyes and smiled, and said, in a voice that had not the slightest trace of fear:

"If I fail you may strangle me, and welcome, but I have not failed yet, Vilcaroya. It is for you to say now whether Golden Star is to awake or not."

"What do you mean?" I said, letting go my grip on his shoulders and recoiling a pace from him.

"You shall hear what I mean," he said. "But you must hear patiently and quietly and think well on what I say, for in your answer to what I ask will also answer the question whether Golden Star is to awake to life and health, or to be put back in that case yonder and buried to rot away into corruption like any other corpse."

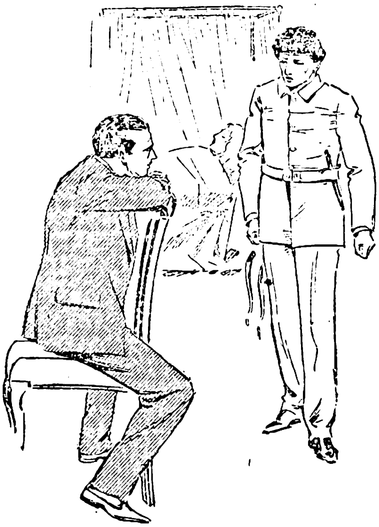
"Say on, I am listening," I said. My lips were dry, and the grip of a deadly fear seemed to be clutching at my heart and draining the last drop of blood from it.

"Listen well, then," he said. Then he paused for a moment as though to collect his thoughts, and make words ready to express them. Then he went on. "You see I have undone the work that your priests did three hundred and sixty years ago. Your Golden Star is now neither dead nor alive. She is lying on the narrow borderland that divides life from death, and for four hours from the time I left this room she will remain there if I choose. At the end of that time she will pass beyond the border, and no earthly power, not even mine, could call her back. But any time before the four hours have expired I can complete the work that I have begun. I can bring the breath back to her body, I can set the blood flowing through her veins. You shall see her eyes open and her lips smile, and you shall hear her speak to you as though she had only awakened out of sleep. This I can do, and I will, if you will do what I am going to ask you."

"What is it?" I whispered, "Tell me quickly that I may know. You are master here. I can only listen and obey."

He smiled as I said this, a smile that it was not good for an honest man to look upon, and went on, speaking now rapidly and earnestly:

"When I did this work for you I did it as a student and a man of science, who was making the greatest experiment of his life. I believed that I had solved one at least of the secrets of life and death. I watched and noted every change that came over you. I marked every symptom and measured every step of your return from death into life, but I did all this as a student inquiring into the mysteries of Nature, as an observer watching the working out of a great problem, with no more feeling than if I had dissected a lifeless corpse. But this time it has been different. I began this work with the cold and passionless deliberation of one who toils only to learn and to succeed. But afterwards—come here and look at her, and you will understand me better. She is a woman, and she is beautiful, and here for two days and two nights she has lain under my hands and my eyes. I have given her beauty back to her, and if that beauty is to live it must be mine. Do you understand me, Vilcaroya?"



Seated himself astride it.

What could I say, what could I do to answer this man whom I hated, and yet who held the power of life and death for Golden Star in his hands. The vague fear that had smitten me when he began to speak had taken its worst form now. I looked at him with hate and horror staring out of my eyes. Again and again I tried to speak, but my lips only moved and trembled without shaping any word. But he read my thoughts and smiled that evil smile of his again and said, in a low voice that seemed to have the echo of a laugh in it:

"I see you hate me, as I have long thought you did, and that is why I have brought you here to tell you this. That is why I would not complete my work till you had sworn as you yet shall do, if you would see Golden Star alive again, that what I have brought back out of the grave shall be mine and mine only."

These last words of his let loose my anger and unchained my tongue. I gripped him by the arm, and in a whisper that had a strange hissing sound I said:

"But that is not all. What do you think your life would be worth if you left her to die? Have you forgotten what I said to you in the cave beneath the Rodadero? Do you not know that this very night I could have you carried, gagged and bound, over the mountains and back to the grave that we took Golden Star out of? Do you not know that I could lay you there with food and drink beside you, that you could not touch, and a lamp whose light would show them to you, and then wall up the entrance again and leave you there to think of your fate till you went mad and died of hunger and thirst? Do you not know that I could chain you to a rock and light a fire about you, and watch you burn limb by limb till you shrieked your life out in lingering agony? Would this be better than going back to your own land loaded with treasure that would make you richer than you have ever dreamed of being? Now I have spoken and it is for you to answer me."

CHAPTER XVI.

Sister for Sister.

Before I had done speaking he had taken a chair and seated himself astride it with his arms resting on the back and his chin on his arms, and was looking at me with white, set face, and steady, dark-shining eyes. When I had finished there was a little silence between us, and then he spoke, and the first time I ever felt fear in either of my lives was when I heard those cold, cruel, carefully-measured words of his:

"That was well said, Vilcaroya. I am glad you have spoken plainly, for now we understand each other; but I don't think you quite realise the difference between your power and mine. You have, or think you have, the brute force, the strength of numbers and the slavish devotion of your people on your side, and you threaten to use that power to put me to a lingering and torturing death unless I withdraw my demands and do as you wish me. In that, however, you are quite wrong. I am as much the master of my own life as I was once of yours and still am the master of Golden Star's. Without moving hand or foot I could kill myself as I sit here before you, so your threats of torture fall to the ground. It is only a matter of simple life or death. If I live Golden Star will live. If I die she will never draw the breath of life—but what I have said, I have said. She shall only live as my promised wife bound to me by the most sacred oath that you can swear.

"You cannot consummate your own marriage with her, because in the modern world that is impossible. You are refusing simply because, for some reason or other, you dislike me personally, but I don't propose that that shall stand in my way. As for your treasures, their value has utterly changed for me. A week ago I frankly confess that I would have sold my soul, if I thought I had one, for them. Now, without Golden Star they would only make the world a golden mockery to me, for I tell you, Vilcaroya, that I, who have never loved living women yet, love that beautiful shape of inanimate clay, as that old sculptor we were telling you of loved his statue. Every hour that I have been alone in this room with her this strange love of mine has grown. First it was only scientific curiosity, then physical admiration, then something else. I don't know what it is, for it is beyond the reach of my analysis, but I know enough of it to call it love, and I tell you it is such love as only a man of my nature and pursuits is capable of. Unsatisfied, it would consume me and kill me, and I would rather die quickly than slowly. Now, once more—shall Golden Star and I live or die?"

How was I to answer such a speech as this? I heard him in silence to the end, my eyes held fast by his, and my spirit sinking as though beaten down by the pitiless force of those cold words of his. And in the meantime a great truth had been dawning in my mind. Force had ceased to rule in this new world, and intellect had taken its throne. I was the inferior of this man whose trained mind was the heir of the generations that had toiled and fought while I had slept. I was little better than a savage before him, and I knew it, and he knew it, and, bitter as the thought was to me, yet it was only the truth. I was conquered, and a new gleam in his eyes told me that he had read my thoughts before I had spoken them.

Then, while I stood hesitating before him, his white, hard-set face softened, and his lips melted into a smile that was almost as sweet as a woman's. It was that that saved me, for it reminded me of Ruth, and the recollection of her told me that I loved even as Djama did. The very thought of her put new blood into my heart. The words of yielding and submission died unuttered on my lips. I raised my head, which I had bowed down in dejection, and looked at him steadily again. Then I said slowly, and in the voice of a man that does not speak twice:

"I have thought, and I will speak for the last time. I will swear by the sacred glory of the Lord of Light that Golden Star shall be yours upon two conditions."

"Conditions!" said he, bringing his dark brows down till they made a straight black line over his eyes. "What are they?"

"These," I said. "You love and I love. First, then, you must win the love of Golden Star, and, secondly, you must give me your sister, Joyful Star, if I can win her love."

"My sister Ruth to *you*! Is that your earnest, Vilcaroya, or are you only trying my patience?"

The bitter, coldly-spoken words cut into my soul as the lash of a whip cuts into the flesh. I could have slain him as he sat there sneering at me, but it was a time for words, not deeds, and so, mastering my anger as best I could, I took two swift strides to Golden Star's bedside, and, snatching my dagger out of the sheath of the belt, which I had put on when I had dressed, I turned and faced him, and said:

"I was not jesting. As you love I love, and by the glory and majesty of my Father the Sun I tell you that if you do not say yes I will do with this dagger what all your art will never repair, and then, if I must do that, I will kill you, too; and before to-morrow night has passed Joyful Star shall be with me where none can find her. Now, what is your answer—yes, or no?"

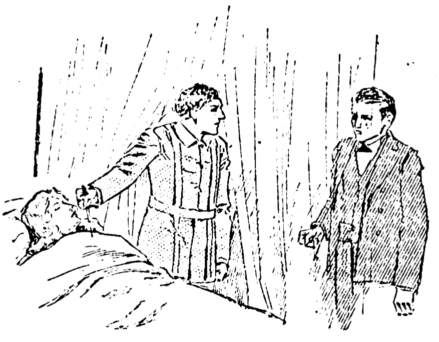
He looked at me and then at the dagger hanging in my hand, point downwards, over the breast of Golden Star. Then his eyes fell upon the still loveliness of her face. He knew that if he moved the dagger would fall. His face, flushed before, at the sound of my words grew grey and pale again, and then I saw that he had not lied to me when he said that his life would be worthless without her. Twice, thrice, his lips moved without shaping a word. Then the words came. They were dry, and broken, and trembling, for in the strength of my own love I had now conquered my conqueror, and he said:

"Yes, since it must be so. My sister for your sister. Well, I suppose it's a fair exchange. We hate each other, you and I, but that's an accident of fate. Sheathe your dagger. I know when I am beaten, and I am beaten now. Will you swear that oath of yours again?"

"Yes," I said, "and you?"

I still kept the dagger within a span of Golden Star's heart, for I still had but little trust in his faith. He rose from his chair, throwing it over as he did so, and stood up and faced me, saying:

"There is no need for oaths either from you or me. We have both too much to lose to break faith. Put up your dagger and come away, and in ten minutes from now you shall hear Golden Star draw the first breath of her new life, and see her eyes open and look at you. That would be worth more than any oath I could swear, wouldn't it?"



I turned and faced him.

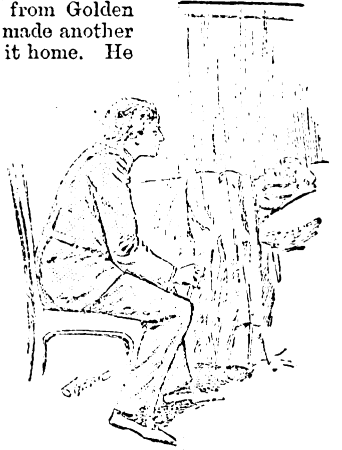
"Yes," I said, "but that is not all or enough. If you broke faith with me after that I should have to shed blood—my sister's and yours. Now I need only make her life impossible. I will stop here. Go you and wake your sister and bring her here. Then we will say more."

"Bring Ruth here!" he cried, staring at me as though he wished, as no doubt he did, that the fierce light in his eyes could blast and wither me where I stood. "Bring her here to see what no human eyes but mine have ever seen! Bring her here to listen to what you have said—and if her, why not Lamson and Hartness as well?"

"You may bring all, if you please," I said, "but Joyful Star must come, no matter what she hears or sees. I have spoken—now go, or Golden Star shall never wake again."

He took a half pace towards me, with clenched hands and set teeth, crouching like a mountain lion about to spring on its prey. The dagger point dropped till it was only an inch from Golden Star's breast. If he had made another step I would have driven it home. He read in my eyes that I would do so, and he stopped. Then he hissed a curse at me through his clenched teeth, and turned and walked away towards the door. As he reached it he looked back, and saw me still standing there with the dagger ready to do the work that could never be undone. I saw his lips move, but heard no sound.

Then he unlocked the door, went out, and locked it after him, leaving me there alone with my dead sister-love, whose new life, with all its possibilities of love and happiness, or hate and misery, I had thrown into the balance of fate in the game that I was playing against him to win that other love which had now become tenfold more dear to me.



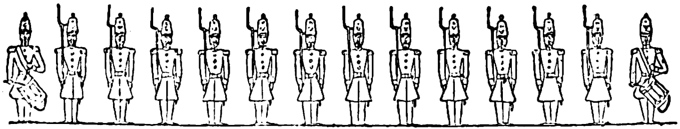
I sat and watched.

When he had gone I picked his chair up and put it by the side of the bed and sat down, still holding my bare dagger in my hand and looking on Golden Star's dead loveliness, wondering what it would be like when the sunshine of her new life should shine upon it, and on whom her first glance would fall or whose name be the first that her lips would speak, and as I sat and watched and waited it seemed to me as though the ghosts of those long dead were taking shape and ranging themselves about the bed of her reawakening as they had done about the bed of her falling asleep and mine.

I saw Anda-Huillac and his brother priests of the Sun standing about me, looking at me and at her with sad and dreamy eyes like phantoms of the past looking upon th realities of the present. Then the shape of Anda-Huillac seemed to glide towards me. His ghostly eyes looked into mine, and a smile of pity and reproach moved his pale lips. I felt a cold soft hand laid upon mine, my grasp relaxed, and the dagger fell ringing to the floor.

The sound awoke me, and my vision vanished. How long it had lasted, or whether it was a vision of sleep or waking I know not, but I was awake now for I heard the door creak on its hinges. I picked the dagger up again and started to my feet, and, still guarding Golden Star's bed, I turned and faced Djama as he came in, followed by the Professor and Francis Hartness, with Joyful Star between them.

(*To be continued.*)



A Little - - - - - Unpleasantness.

THE Bradley-Lester wedding was a grand social pageant, with the usual number of pretty bridesmaids in picturesque hats, the inevitable little pages clothed in Fauntleroy suits of velvet, the white-faced bride enveloped in a priceless veil of old point (a family relic), and the nervous bridegroom, who heartily wished the whole confounded ceremony over and done with.

It took place in a fashionable church to the accompaniment of a full choral service, and the pews were filled with well-known society people, who whispered and nodded during the wait for the bridal party, and made audible comments, complimentary and otherwise, about the family relatives, who formed a solid phalanx in the front of the church.

It was generally conceded that the marriage of Irene Lester to Godfrey Bradley was a most happy arrangement, and Mother Grundy nodded her wary old head approvingly.

Irene was young, beautiful, and well connected; Godfrey was also young, handsome, and well-to-do. Could anything be more appropriate than that the agreeable couple should fall in love, marry, and set up another establishment where society patriarchs could count upon being dined and wined several times a season?

"I am so glad that Irene will be married and out of the way before Maud comes out," one handsome matron remarked to her dearest friend. "She was quite a dangerous rival, with her queer, big eyes and Madonna-like hair."

"I only hope she will be content to settle down and stop flirting, now that she has established herself so nicely; but one never can tell, nowadays, the young married women are the girls' worst enemies," the dear friend replied lugubriously.

"I think Godfrey can be relied upon to keep her in order," the first speaker retorted drily. "I believe he is not at all the sort of man to stand any fooling on the part of his wife. He's rather a dangerous creature when aroused, I hear."

"Well, I hope everything will be all right; but Irene is a very independent girl, and there is something rather odd about her," quoth this Job's comforter.

As to the young couple themselves, they had no doubt whatever of its being all right. They were madly in love with one another, and the honeymoon was a period of delight, which extended over the whole first year of their united existence.

Their establishment was everything that taste could desire and money procure.

Their little dinners were social and culinary triumphs, and Mrs. Godfrey Bradley's "Evenings at Home" were always largely attended.

Mr. Bradley passed the year in dreamy retrospect, as he leant back in his own particular lounging chair before a crackling log, which embellished the bijou grate of his smoking den.

"I don't believe there are many people in the world as happy as Rene and I," he thought. "We've been married a whole year now (Jove! it hardly seems possible), and, as yet, we haven't had a single row. Now, I call that a pretty good record for a pair of high-spirited young folk; but, then, Rene is such a darling; why, a man would be a brute that could quarrel with her. I wonder what Jack meant the other evening when he asked if I was never jealous of my wife. Jealous! Why, I should as soon think of being jealous of my mother as of Rene. I suppose he thinks that because she is so beautiful I must be jealous of the admiration she arouses. Pouf! I should feel myself a beast to suspect a pure, true-hearted woman like Rene. Of course, she attracts the men, bless her! How can she help it? I can't blame her for that, and, what is more, I can't blame the men either, for I was attracted pretty strongly myself."

At this point his cigar interrupted the pleasing reverie by going out. The interruption was a bore, especially as he could find no matches in the room.

"I must speak to Rene again about having the servants keep matches in this room," he growled irritably. "Between them they seem to take an especial delight in leaving my boxes empty."

A piece of paper upon the floor caught his eye, and with a grunt of satisfaction he picked it up and twisted it into a fuse, which he lit in the grate and by its aid was soon again puffing comfortably at his cigar.

"Let me see, what was I thinking about?" he mused, as he settled back again. "Gad! that's a pretty fire; feels good, too. What—what is that?"

During the next five minutes Mr. Godfrey Bradley's cigar took occasion to go out again, for he sat staring fixedly at the charred bit of paper which had fallen just outside the fender.

These were the words that had attracted his attention: "Sweetest Hal, do you remember our last kiss?"

"My wife's handwriting!" he said at last in a tone of horror. Like a man under the influence of a bad dream, he stooped and picked up the scrap of paper. It was a half-sheet of note-paper carelessly torn off. Part of the sheet was burned up, but what remained was all sufficient.

"I suppose moralists would tell us that it is our duty to remain apart, since I have a husband and you a wife, and of course I know that the right thing for me to do would be to tell you that I will never see you again; but oh, my bonny lover, I cannot, cannot do that. I worship you, I adore you, I hunger for the touch of your hands. Your past kisses burn my mouth till I thirst for more. Duty is less than nothing to me, society, friends—all as naught beside the dear delight of your presence, the love flame in your dear eyes. Sweetest Hal, do you remember our last kiss?" The rest was charred to a cinder.

Godfrey Bradley carefully smoothed out the little white piece of paper and laid it upon the table.

Then he read it over and over again until every word was branded indelibly upon his heart.

"My wife's handwriting," he repeated again, after awhile, in a low, piteous voice. "Rene, my wife, writing like that to a man named Hal! There must be some mistake! I can't suspect Rene. No! oh, no! She is too good, too true, too noble to indulge in a vulgar intrigue. I will not believe wrong of her until she confesses to me with her own lips."

A light step sounded outside the door, and a sweet young voice cried:

"Godfrey, Godfrey, you lazy boy, still dawdling over your cigar? Do you know it is quite time to start for the opera if we expect to show ourselves there to-night? Just see how nice I look!"

The door flew open, and Mrs. Godfrey Bradley, in white satin and pearls, fluttered across the threshold, and assumed the coquettish pose of a beautiful woman who is sure of her own charms.

"Why, Godfrey, what is the matter?" This in an aggrieved tone. "You look as solemn as an owl, and you haven't said a word about how lovely I look. I don't care, though, I know I'm just stunning to-night; other men will admire me if you don't."

"So it seems," Godfrey said drily.

"You blessed old bore of a hubby, I do believe it would be a simple impossibility to make you jealous."

Godfrey sank back into his chair and put his hands over his face.

"I could get jealous enough if I had any cause," he said in a muffled voice.

Irene fluttered across the room and sank on her knees beside him.

"What is it, sweetheart?" she cried tenderly. "Are you worried about something?"

"Yes."

"Oh, my darling husband, and I have been tormenting you with my silly nonsense; but I didn't know, dearest; I'm sure you seemed all right at dinner. Can you not tell me what is bothering you?"

Godfrey raised his head, and gazed straight into his wife's eyes.

"What is the matter, dearest?" she implored. "I have a right to your confidence. Is it business trouble?"

"No, Rene, it is not business."

"What can it be, then!" the woman murmured perplexedly.

"Don't you know of anything that would trouble me if I found it out? Is there no secret you are keeping from me, Rene?"

The woman's eyes dropped nervously under her husband's searching gaze. It seemed to her he was reading her very soul.

"Are you deceiving me, Rene, my wife?"

A guilty flood of crimson suffused her face.

"Why, Godfrey—why do you ask me such a curious question? How could I deceive you?"

"Look into my eyes, dear."

She drew herself away from his gentle touch and sprang to her feet.

"I don't know what you mean. You are speaking very strangely, and I do not choose to answer any more of your questions. Come, are you going to the opera, or shall I go alone?"

"You shall not leave this room until you have answered every question I may wish to put to you."

The man's tone was harsh for the first time.

"Sir!" With an outraged gesture Rene started towards the door.

"Stop!" Godfrey commanded, and the passion in his voice caused Rene to pause, trembling.

"Did you write this?" extending the tell-tale bit of paper.

Rene gasped affrightedly.

"Where did you get that?" she asked angrily.

"Never mind where I got it! Did you write it?"

"Yes, I did write it, and if you are going to behave so disagreeably about it, I am glad of it. You are a sneak, or you would not have come to my desk and read my private papers."

"You ackrowledge that you wrote that?" Godfrey was stunned. He had hoped against hope that his wife was innocent.

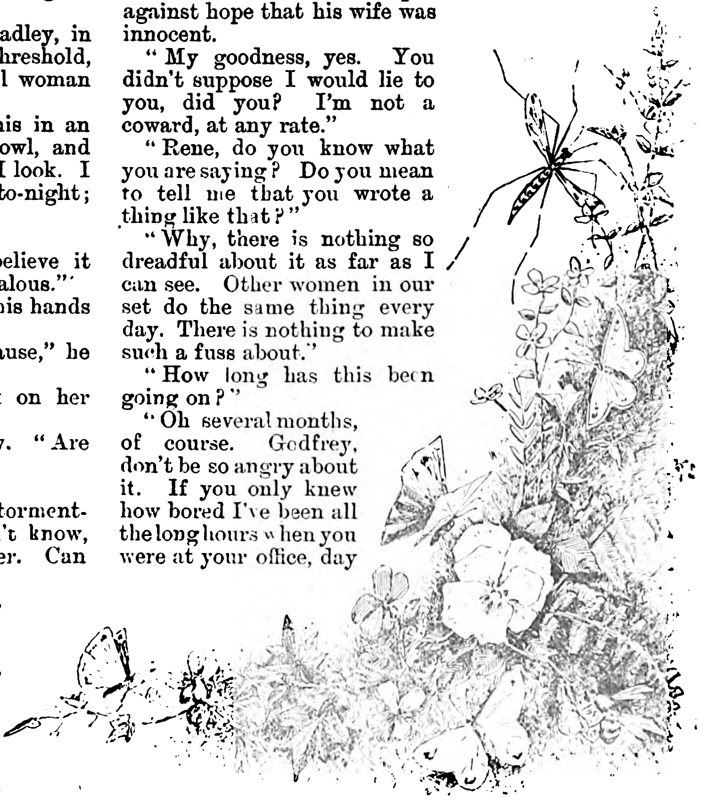
"My goodness, yes. You didn't suppose I would lie to you, did you? I'm not a coward, at any rate."

"Rene, do you know what you are saying? Do you mean to tell me that you wrote a thing like that?"

"Why, there is nothing so dreadful about it as far as I can see. Other women in our set do the same thing every day. There is nothing to make such a fuss about."

"How long has this been going on?"

"Oh several months, of course. Godfrey, don't be so angry about it. If you only knew how bored I've been all the long hours when you were at your office, day



after day. I had to amuse myself in some way; that's all. I dare say you do just as bad things every day. Mrs. Grey says men are always up to something that they don't tell their wives about."

Godfrey Bradley stared at his childish young wife in horror.

"So you call it amusement to play with a man's love and break his heart," he said slowly.

"Oh, Godfrey, don't be so absurd. I've always told you you took life too seriously. You must learn, dearest, that you can't have everything your own way. Now, of course, I'm awfully fond of you, but I must live my own life and amuse myself as I see fit. I know just how old-fashioned and strait-laced you are in your ideas, and that's why I've tried to keep this thing a secret from you. I felt sure you would hear of it sooner or later, though, because nearly everybody in our set is talking about it."

Godfrey started violently. "Then I am the last to hear of my own dishonour."

"Oh, bosh! What peculiar, old fogeyish terms you use, Godfrey. It is positively ridiculous for you to make such a fuss, and it has no effect whatever upon me. I have made up my mind to lead a perfectly independent existence, and to enjoy myself as much as I can, and you may as well understand it now once for all. I shall ask you no questions as to how you spend your days, and shall demand the same reticence on your part. Then we can spend the evenings together, and I will promise not to broach any unpleasant subjects in your presence."

Godfrey commenced to pace backwards and forwards the length of the room.

"Now, don't get tragical, my dear husband, I beg of you. I know you would like to box me up in the house and make a perfect saint of me, but I won't have it. I'm young and bright, and other people appreciate me if you don't. Besides, every one has not your silly domestic ideas. All I ask is to have a good time, and be allowed the freedom other women enjoy."

"I don't believe you know what you are talking about."

"Oh, yes, I do, too. I know quite well. I suppose you are astonished to find that I have any independence at all."

"I believe you are mentally unsound, or you would never talk to me as you have to-night. But understand, Irene, once for all, this sort of thing must cease immediately."

"My dear Godfrey, as I have just told you, it will not cease, and I don't know what you are going to do about it."

Her mocking words added fuel to the man's rising anger.

"I'll get a divorce."

Mrs. Bradley laughed. "You couldn't get one for a little thing like that. Well, ta, ta, I'm off to the opera. I hope you will feel better when I come home. If not, I shall expect to have divorce papers served up with my breakfast to-morrow morning."

A few minutes later Godfrey heard the carriage rumble away, bearing his wife to the great society show-place.

He flung himself prostrate upon the floor in his agony, and buried his face in a great fur rug.

"She is utterly shameless—not worthy of one regret. I will put her and her miserable lover out of my life for ever. She is beneath an honest man's contempt, let alone his vengeance. I only hope she'll make that other man suffer as she has me."

An hour later Godfrey Bradley left his home bearing a small bag.

He hurried across the street towards the station. His plan was not very definite, but his intention to leave his wife was decisive.

As he stepped into the train some one slapped him heartily upon the shoulder.

"Hullo! old man, where are you off to now?"

It was Blake, his oldest friend.

"Only a little business journey," Godfrey stammered.

"Ah, so! How is that pretty wife of yours getting on? I tell you what, Godfrey, you ought to be proud of that little woman. She's got positive talent. That novel of hers is splendid."

"Novel?" The word was one long interrogation point.

"Of course. Now don't be so modest, just because your wife wrote it. I tell you she's rapidly becoming famous."

Godfrey changed the subject, and got out at the next station on the plea of having forgotten something.

When Mrs. Bradley returned from the opera, somewhat nervous over the effect of her self-assertion, she found her husband deeply engrossed in a book called "A Social Passion."

As she entered the room he looked up at her with a world of love and admiration in his eyes.

"Has my book melted your heart, dear?" she asked eagerly.

"And is this how you amused yourself?" Godfrey asked.

Rene nodded gaily. "Are you not sorry you scolded me?"

"I was a brute; but you must remember that I did not know you had been amusing yourself to such good purpose, and then I thought——"

"What did you think, dear?"

"Never mind now, love; let's kiss and make up."

And Mr. Bradley never told his wife how he had thought she had been amusing herself.

OSWALD EVERETT.

We are going to publish a Magazine. . . . It will be called

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It will be beautifully Illustrated. . . . It will cost Sixpence. . . . It will be Published Monthly. . . . The first number will appear on

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These facts are tersely put. They are to be remembered.

We owe no apology for invading a field apparently, perhaps, adequately occupied. We can truthfully say that "**PEARSON'S MAGAZINE**" will resemble no other. Holding an opinion, whether rightly or wrongly, that the whole conception and conduct of the British Magazine as it exists to-day is far behind what it should be, we are endeavouring to issue an ideal one. The whole thing will be so original, will embody so many new ideas, and will give so much for so little, that we confidently expect to see "**PEARSON'S MAGAZINE**" take the first rank in popularity and prestige from the very commencement.

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THE ✱ YOUTH.

MRS. GROSVENOR was fond of her husband, in a desultory sort of way; this was a fact no one disputed. She allowed him a great many privileges she did not accord her other admirers, and he had even been known to call her "dear" in public. To be sure, this familiarity had caused him to be banished to the side of the homeliest girl in the place for the remainder of the evening, but no other punishment had been visited upon his head on account of it, and he felt as if he had made a great step forward that night in her affection. And Mrs. Grosvenor was a woman who did not waste her affections on anyone, excepting, perhaps, herself.

When she went to North Wales she took in her train a large retinue of faithful followers, who virtually tumbled over each other to do her bidding or bask in the warmth of her smile. Clubmen as well as youngsters were included among these retainers, and the list, as she looked over it the day after her arrival, warmed the cool heart of the little lady. Then she settled down to enjoy herself by making them all happy or unhappy as the spirit moved. Before the week was out Llandudno had recognised her as the season's leader and authority on all matters of social import; and the recognition was mutual.

In the front rank of the devoted admirers the Youth was perhaps the most energetic and determined. He was a pale, thin, eager fellow, blessed with ample worldly goods and an ancient name, and possessing enough brains to enjoy life and overspend his income. He had enlisted in Mrs. Grosvenor's command a few months previous to her departure from town, and he was the first to follow her to North Wales.

His sisters, two pretty, simple-minded girls, had done their best to prevent this, but with only that success which might have been prophesied. Headstrong and heartweak the Youth smiled at their intreaties, and ordered his man to have his luggage ready by five that afternoon; and a day later, with his boxes and trunks, horses, drags, and coaches, he descended upon Llandudno, and went to his mental and moral death like a much older man. Within a week, by the aid of three moonlight nights and two long drives over the picturesque mountain roads, he had completely succumbed, and was reading, writing, and talking his love at every opportunity.

Mrs. Grosvenor was a kind-hearted woman, and she did not believe in denying children innocent pleasures. At least she told her husband so in one of her semi-occasional letters; and to have a well-bred Youth who has yet the charm and freshness of tender age about him, in love with one, is not the most disagreeable thing in the world. When one is married and has crossed the thirty-year line, it is on the whole rather pleasant than otherwise, and Mrs. Grosvenor had reached that point in her life, even if she did not acknowledge it to everyone.

Therefore, she smiled when he whispered burning words of devotion into her pretty ears—words he ought not to have known save through experience, and not, as he had learned them, through reading novels—and did not say him nay. If there were any favourites in her circle for that summer, the Youth led the list; a fact the older men recognised but did not worry over. They knew Mrs. Grosvenor; and the Youth would not last for ever.

He was an excellent whip, and the possessor of a fine stud, and when he brought out his tally-ho, Mrs. Grosvenor kindly chaperoned the party and sat upon the box with him. She openly admired the manner in which he handled the spirited four, and so set him up thereby that he could have driven all night and thought it but an hour.

As day succeeded day his devotion grew and waxed great, until the older men could not help smiling in pity.

A fortnight passed, and Grosvenor ran down one evening to spend a few days within the edge of her circle and get a breath of fresh air before starting off on the yacht for a month's cruise. He took his wife easily, did Grosvenor—and was a fool, his friends said—but he seemed, nevertheless, to have a moderately happy life, and that was quite as much as they could boast of. The Youth interested him because of his ever-present freshness and ingenuous ways, and he seemed a harmless toy for the older man's wife. On this point the man and woman agreed the first night Grosvenor spent there.

As for the Youth, his infatuation continued to increase with every hour, until one evening the climax came and he made the fool of himself Mrs. Grosvenor had expected him to make for a week past.

"My dear boy," she said as gently as she could, when he had done, "do not be foolish or rave so—your face is so much better when in repose. You are a nice boy, and I like you, but don't you remember that I am married after all? You must not say such things in earnest—you really must not. It is not good for you, and it bores me." Then she smiled gently.

"Married?" repeated the Youth passionately, "yes—to a man who can no more appreciate you than a lump of clay could; who can no more understand you than he can reach your mental level, and——"

"But husbands never do that," said she quietly; "and he is my husband."

"But you care for me?" said the youth, clenching his hands and taking a step forward, "you care for me, do you not—a little?"

"A great deal," said the woman softly, letting her beautiful eyes tell his soul much more than she thought or meant.

Then he paused and looked at her strangely, with his heart pumping the blood into his throat with trebled force.

"Darling!" he cried, suddenly, going half way to his knees in his eagerness.

"But he is my husband," said she.

Once again the Youth stopped, and a wild idea came into his feverish brain.

"Is that all—all that stands between us?" he asked in a hurried whisper. "If he were not, would you marry me?"

She smiled languidly, and a very, very far-away look came into her eyes.

"I think I would," she said quietly, as much to herself as to him, "for you are a nice boy. Yes, if he were—but what nonsense we are talking. Come, let us go, *mon ami.*"

"Yes," said the Youth, grown suddenly old, it almost seemed, and with a strained note in his voice, "yes, nonsense." Then, as they went towards the house, so many strange thoughts came into his love-crazed brain that he said nothing more, and Mrs. Grosvenor felt disappointed for the first time that season.

A few days later the Youth brought his drag down the steep mountain road of the Sychnant Pass with Grosvenor beside him. The others had got out to walk home over the mountain paths. The road was not a good one nor yet a safe one, but Grosvenor liked the Youth, and had unlimited faith in his driving. So, also, had the Youth.

"It is rather steep here," said the latter, as they whirled about a lonely little bend, and came in sight of a sheer hundred-foot precipice round which the road wound at the top, "but we are all right if the leaders keep their heads."

Grosvenor smiled, and answered, as he looked at the set, determined face of the Youth. "I think they will."

But a moment later the smile died on his lips, for suddenly the long lash the Youth held sang out over the nervous horses, and came down with slashing cut on the leaders. Before Grosvenor could speak it had whirled and fallen like an angry white serpent upon the wheelers, and the four were rushing down the road, half wild with fright and surprise.

"Be careful, you little fool," cried Grosvenor, growing pale and losing his faith all in the moment. "What in the name of fortune is the matter with you?"

There was no answer, nor did the Youth look at him. Bracing himself steadily he guided the plunging animals as best he could until they reached the cliff, and it seemed that he had control of them once more. But this lasted but a second. With set teeth and a firm hand he brought all four sharply about and drove them straight over the precipice into the trees and brush far below. Kicking and squealing with fright the horses dashed over the brink and the coach plunged after, while the Youth, as calm and quiet as if nothing were wrong, took a splendid jump for safety.

An hour or two later, with his bandages and slings arranged as comfortably as possible, the Youth knocked at Mrs. Grosvenor's door. The people outside were busily, and now and again noisily, discussing the terrible accident, but he did not hear them or start when his name was mentioned.

Presently the door opened softly, and the beautiful woman, more beautiful than ever in her grief and worry, came quietly out.

"You!" she cried, when she saw him.

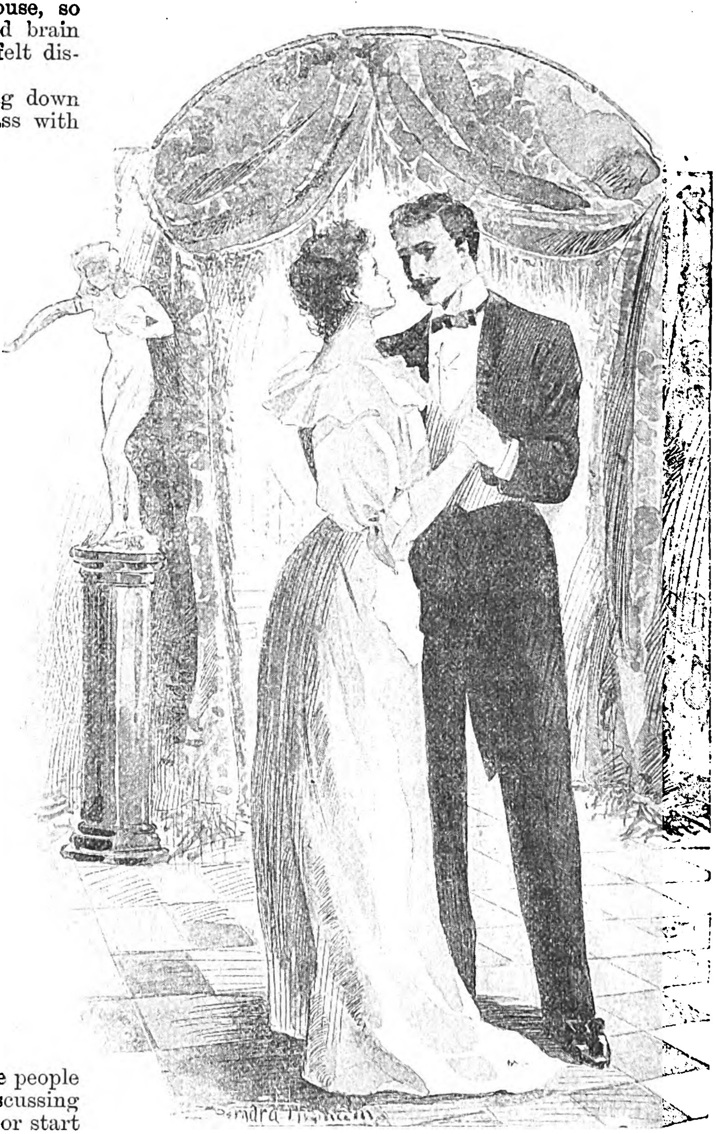
The Youth did not speak immediately, but looked at her with a question of greater import in his own eyes. "Yes," he said at last, "I. And he——?"

A deep flush spread over her face from throat to brow, as she answered in a whisper: "The doctors say he will live till morning, perhaps. More than that they cannot say. Oh, Heavens!" she cried, suddenly, putting her face in her hands and turning away, "how can I stand it!"

The Youth ran his tongue about his parched lips, and his eyes grew big and eager again.

"But you said," he murmured, "you said—if he were out of the way—we would both be happy——"

With a cry of fear and disgust she drew quickly back from him, and stood looking in abhorrent surprise at the wretched Youth.



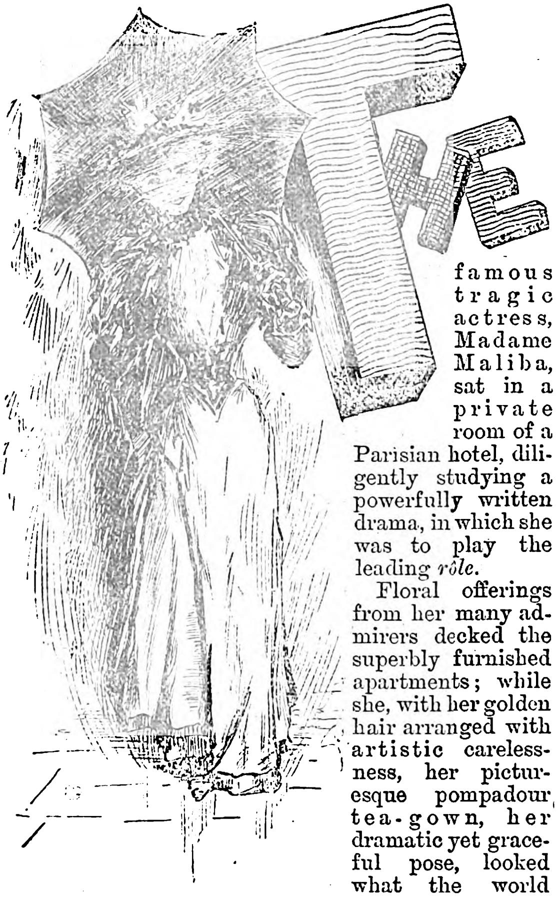
"A great deal," said the woman softly.

"Don't you remember?" he went on, in a dull, half-whining voice, "don't you remember what you said? You can't forget; you——"

He did not finish the sentence, for with a half suppressed scream of utter horror she had placed her hands against his bruised breast, and pushed him far away from her. Without a word he turned and walked down the corridor, still dazed and wondering.

And then, for the first time, Mrs. Grosvenor fully realised what she had done. E. J. APPLETON.

An Unrehearsed Performance.



The famous tragic actress, Madame Maliba, sat in a private room of a Parisian hotel, diligently studying a powerfully written drama, in which she was to play the leading *rôle*.

Floral offerings from her many admirers decked the superbly furnished apartments; while she, with her golden hair arranged with artistic carelessness, her picturesque pompadour tea-gown, her dramatic yet graceful pose, looked what the world everywhere acknowledged, an inimitable queen of histrionic art.

This hour before dinner was perhaps the only one she could call her own, and she usually spent it luxuriating in a lounge before the fire, lazily reviewing the events of the day; but something in the act she has just finished brought to memory her brief married life, with its miserable misunderstandings and fatal end; also the vision of a curly-headed lad who calls her mother, on her rare visits to her northern home, and for whose sake she has striven so successfully for the world's goodwill.

The grand blue eyes, as renowned as her art, grew misty with tears that glistened and fell in the firelight. Again she rehearsed the scene in which the heroine, finding herself at the mercy of a vengeance-seeking husband—who wrongly imagines himself betrayed—wildly implores him to spare her life for the sake of her innocent child.

It will need all the power and passion of which she is mistress, and as she closes the book her eyes sparkle and her cheeks glow with the prophetic sense of success.

The door suddenly opened, and a voice rather apologetically announced "Le Docteur de Vigny." Ere she could decline to receive him at this unwelcome hour, her visitor pushed lightly by the astonished waiter and entered her presence.

Tall, dark, and sallow, with eyes of peculiar brightness, and with remarkably sunken cheeks, he yet presented a distinguished appearance, though his coat was by no means of a conventional cut. Breaking into a thousand apologies, he explained the cause of his visit. "Madame, I have made the science of medicine a lifelong study, and have discovered a variety of remedies for all affections arising from exhaustion of the brain power.

"You, madame, I believe, are suffering at present from this cause." He drew a paper from his pocket, and turned it down at a paragraph in which the press announced "the glad arrival of Madame Maliba in the French capital, whither she had come to consult a specialist respecting the impaired state of her nervous system, the result of the long and marvellously successful run of the late play."

She smiled rather coldly as she returned the paper.

He was evidently some infatuated quack who, after a lengthy preamble concerning his impoverished circumstances, would conclude by begging a subscription towards the intended publication of a medical treatise, which, of course, would never appear.

"I am afraid this paper overrates my exertions; but what of your cure?"

He drew a shabby morocco case from his pocket, and laid two dark, sinewy hands across it before answering. Then she noticed for the first time his wildly bright eye, reflecting some hidden fire.

"A baffled genius," decided the successful actress, and she addressed him more kindly.

"I shall be very pleased to try your remedy and recommend it to others if it prove successful."

"For this very reason have I sought so distinguished a patient, knowing that when I had effected a cure, your fame might herald my own. The chief merits of my treatment," he continued, very slowly and gravely, without raising his hands from the case, "are the simplicity, celerity, and certainty of success." Then, lowering his voice, he went on.

"It mainly consists in amputating the affected member and thoroughly cleansing the seat of disease. In your case, madame, it will necessitate the removal of the head, so as to regulate the activity of the cerebral organs." He opened the case and revealed a glittering, highly-tempered dissecting-knife.

In an instant the truth flashed upon her. She was in the presence and virtually in the power of a monomaniac. For a moment only the elaborately furnished room swam giddily round her, but summoning the *sang froid* of which she had more than an ordinary share, and which had borne her so successfully through the varied experiences of her early chequered career, she crushed back her terror, and asked, as calmly as possible:

"I had better then summon my maid to assist me?"

Hastily intercepting her action, he planted himself between her and the door.

"Madame," he replied, with a profound bow, and deeply respectful manner. "It is not my rule to allow a third person to assist at an operation, as they invariably excite the patient, nor is there occasion for any unnecessary preliminary preparation. For this reason I have intruded on your most private hour."

One glance at his face showed his fixed determination to carry out his purpose. Concealing her apprehension, she looked about for means of escape. Not one presented itself.

The sole entrance to her room was guarded by her unwelcome guest. Her maid had leave of absence for at least an hour.

The apartment was situated in the more private part of the hotel, so that to deliberately ring or call for assistance would perhaps but expedite matters before help could arrive, and her fear rendered her incapable of offering direct bodily resistance. She must temporise, so as to gain time and opportunity.

"Have you affected many cures?" she asked pleasantly, resuming her seat with the peculiarly graceful manner, that was so well-known.

"Yours must have been a most uncertain life," she continued in the hope of diverting his thoughts, while she partially screened her face from the firelight, and furtively followed his every expression.

Again the glittering eye flashed as he spoke.

"The life of knowledge condemned by the ignorant; shrinking and hiding away by day, wandering solitary, starving and haunted by night, because I would enlighten the world. But they ever pursue me. Hark, did you not hear a step?"

He started, half rose, and listened, one hand tightly grasping the glittering knife, the hungry, haunted eyes fixed on the calm, fair woman before him.

"It is no one; I shall not be interrupted for some time," she returned as composedly as ever. Recovering himself, his face assumed a look of cunning that had been a stranger to it hitherto.

"I fancy I have baffled them this time," he explained. "I have taken his name to-day, and thus he admitted me everywhere; but shall I tell you who I am?" He advanced and breathed a name in her ear, a name that had but a short time before filled all Paris with horror.

Though she blanched to the lips her courage never failed, and she smiled as coquettishly as she might have done had he been one of her most enthusiastic admirers.

"Then I am flattered by this visit."

Soothed by her repose, he said, with an old-world bow:

"Madame, you have honoured me with your attention, in return I will give you my confidence. I am anxious to prove that there exists in everyone a living electrometer, answering to the different circumstances under which the brain acts, and which may attain a higher or lower state of electricity, according to the need of the patient, when ably regulated by medical science. The symptoms in your case are precisely those I have been seeking in order to prove my theory. Now, madame, if you will allow me, I will work my cure."

She rose and turned the lights higher. Her hour had surely come. Often and often had her incomparable acting and presence of mind favourably decided the fate of a play trembling in the balance of a first night's decision. Her very life was at stake now; she would make one effort to save it.

A glorious idea thrilled her bewildered brain, and steadied her shaking nerves. Her art, the goddess she had served and worshipped, should not desert her now. With an inward prayer to that Higher Power which each one of us acknowledges in moments of peril, she thought of her *rôle* in the new drama. It might answer her very need.

She turned with the bewitching smile that was known half over Europe, and said:

"Monsieur, one moment, if you please. I have to rehearse a new part for the first time to-morrow, and as it will naturally be too late to do so after my operation, with your permission I will go through it once again before we begin. Please take my chair near the fire, it may perhaps interest you to hear me." With her white, jewelled hand she took up the cushions and gracefully waved him towards it. Distracted by the charm of her manner he seated himself as desired, but his glittering eye never left the door, nor his hand the knife.

She stood before him, this beautiful, renowned woman, in her trailing, gleaming draperies, and her matchless grace, as she had stood before beings in the zenith of her success, and began to act for a higher wage than she had ever received yet—her own life.

Very gradually she awakened his interest in the plot, leading it up to the most powerful scene between the pleading wife and outraged husband. Now the wild light would die out of his eye, as for a while he forgot his purpose; now the very dawn of reason would flit over his face as some magnetic sympathy in the actress's tone awakened his slumbering senses; his fingers relaxed their hold on the knife; once it had almost slipped to the ground, but quickly recovering it he had also remembered himself.

Still, she was gaining time; at any moment now the guests must pass her door on their way to their rooms to dress for the evening. Then she must make them hear. Even as this revolved in her mind, she had never acted so superbly, had never merited more applause.

But her strength was failing her fast, she knew that very soon she would have no longer control of her actions, nor the power to hold his fancy. How silent the corridor seemed; would no one ever pass by?

How oppressively the exotics scented the air. Surely the atmosphere was becoming thicker; how difficult it was to breathe. The lights were burning dimmer now—nay, the lights in the room were a pair of dark glittering eyes. One pair? Ten thousand that were burning into her brain. But beware! his hand is seeking the polished steel blade; she must not let her interest flag in her part; she sees the only thing that is left her to love, her boy, and hears him ask for his mother; she sees the child in the play, and stands before her merciless husband, who now looks so like her silent guest.

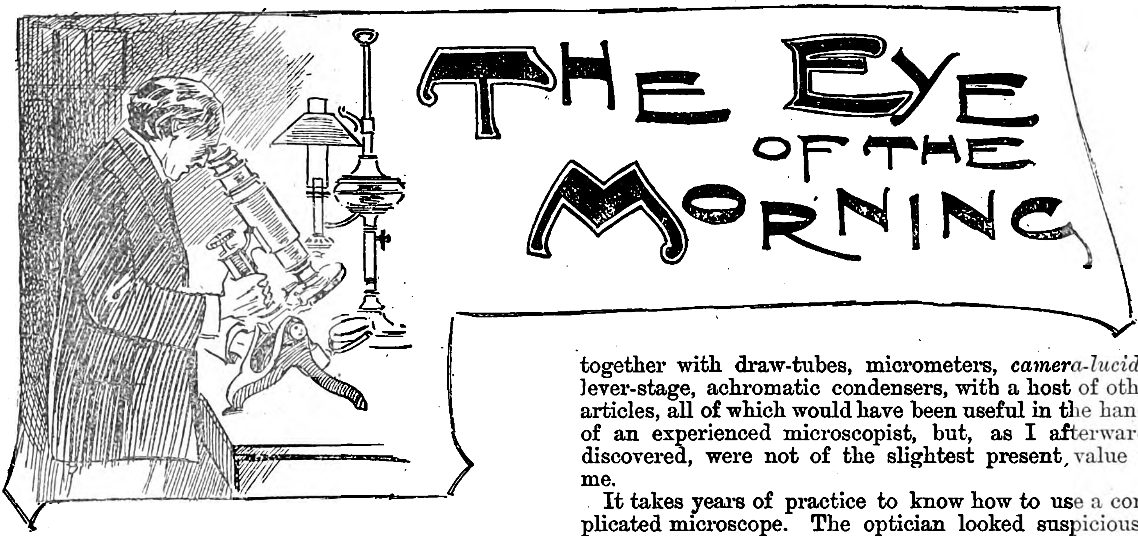
She begs, she implores with the passionate tears and prayers the part demands; but her voice grows louder and louder, it rings through the room and echoes through the corridor, and yet the man never moves; he sees what she sees, he feels as she feels, there is a desperate cry for her own life, one long reverberating cry for her child's—then hark! A step! Two, three, hundreds of hurrying feet rushing along the corridor and bursting into the room.

With starting eyeballs and jabbering ashen lips she points to her tormentor and yells.

"Seize him, he is mad!"

Not to-morrow, nor for many to-morrows did Madame Maliba rehearse the play in which she subsequently rose to the height of her genius, for a critical attack of brain fever and a weary convalescence followed the visit of her lunatic guest, who on the night of that eventful day was safely relodged in a *maison de santé* under the superintendence of the doctor whose name he had borrowed.

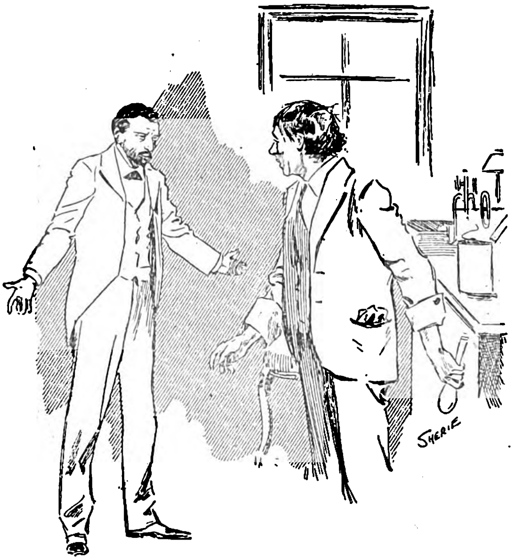
B. E. Stone.



THE EYE OF THE MORNING

FROM a very early period of my life the entire bent of my inclination had been towards microscopic investigations. When I was not more than ten years old, a distant relative of our family, seeing me so interested in a small microscope, explained to me all that he knew about the principles of the instrument, related to me a few of the wonders which had been accomplished through its agency. and ended by sending me a valuable treatise on the instrument—its history, uses, and discoveries.

I comprehended then for the first time the "Arabian Nights' Entertainments." The dull veil of ordinary existence that hung across the world seemed suddenly to roll away, and to lay bare a land of enchantments.



"Ah, mon ami," he cried.

I penetrated beyond the external portal of things, and roamed through the sanctuaries. Where my companions beheld only a drop of rain slowly rolling down the window-glass, I saw a universe of beings animated with all the passions common to physical life, and convulsing their minute sphere with struggles as fierce and protracted as those of men. In the common spots of mildew, which my mother—good housekeeper that she was—scooped away from her jam pots, there abode for me enchanted gardens, filled with dells and avenues of the densest foliage, and most astonishing verdure, while from the fantastic boughs of these microscopic forests hung strange fruits glittering with green, and silver, and gold.

At the age of twenty I determined to study medicine in London. I discovered suitable apartments in Russell Square, and devoted all my energies to the adornment of the temple of my worship. I visited a celebrated optician and purchased a magnificent microscope, together with draw-tubes, micrometers, *camera-lucida*, lever-stage, achromatic condensers, with a host of other articles, all of which would have been useful in the hands of an experienced microscopist, but, as I afterwards discovered, were not of the slightest present value to me.

It takes years of practice to know how to use a complicated microscope. The optician looked suspiciously at me as I made the wholesale purchases. He evidently was uncertain whether to set me down as some scientific celebrity or a madman. I think he inclined to the latter belief. I suppose I was mad. Every great genius is mad upon the subject in which he is greatest. The unsuccessful madman is disgraced and called a lunatic.

Like all active microscopists, I gave my imagination full play. Indeed, it is a common complaint against many such, that they supply the defects of their instruments with the creations of their brains. I imagined depth beyond depth in Nature which the limited power of my lenses prohibited me from exploring. I lay awake at night constructing imaginary microscopes of immeasurable power, with which I seemed to pierce through all the envelopes of matter down to its original atom.

How I cursed those imperfect mediums which necessity, through ignorance, compelled me to use. How I longed to discover the secret of some perfect lens, whose magnifying power should be limited only by the resolvability of the object, and which at the same time should be free from spherical and chromatic aberrations—in short, from all the obstacles over which the poor microscopist of the present day finds himself continually stumbling.

I felt convinced that the simple microscope, composed of a single lens of such vast, yet perfect power, was possible of construction. To attempt to bring the compound microscope up to such a pitch would have been commencing at the wrong end, this latter being simply a partially successful endeavour to remedy those very defects of the simple instrument, which, if conquered, would leave nothing to be desired.

It was in this mood of mind that I became a constructive microscopist. After another year passed in this new pursuit, experimenting on every imaginable substance—glass, gems, flints, crystals, artificial crystals formed of the alloy of various vitreous elements; in short, having constructed as many varieties of lenses as Argus had eyes, I found myself precisely where I started, with nothing gained save an extensive knowledge of glass-making. I was almost dead with despair.

I was in this frame of mind one day, experimenting in my laboratory on a small diamond—that stone, from its great refracting power, having always occupied my attention more than any other—when a young Frenchman, who lived on the floor above me, and who was in the habit of occasionally visiting me, entered the room.

I think that Jules Simon was a Jew. He had many traits of the Hebrew character—a love of jewellery, of dress, and of good living. There was something mysterious about him. He always had something to sell, and yet went into excellent society.

On the present occasion Simon entered my room in a state of considerable excitement.

"*Ah, mon ami!*" he cried, before I could even offer him the ordinary salutation, "it has occurred to me to be the witness of the most astonishing things in the world. I promenade myself to the house of Madame —how does the little animal—*le renard*—name himself in the Latin?"

"Vulpes," I answered.

"Ah! yes—Vulpes. I promenade myself to the house of Madame Vulpes."

"The spirit medium?"

"Yes, the great medium. Great Heavens! what a woman! I write on a slip of paper many of questions concerning affairs the most secret—affairs that conceal themselves in the abysses of my heart the most profound; and behold, by example, what occurs? This woman makes me replies the most truthful to all of them. She talks to me of things that I do not love to talk of to myself. What am I to think? I am fixed to the earth!"

"Am I to understand you, M. Simon, that this Mrs. Vulpes replies to questions secretly written by you, which questions related to events known only to yourself?"

"Ah! more than that, more than that," he answered, with an air of some alarm. "She related to me things —— but," he added, after a pause, and suddenly changing his manner, "why occupy ourselves with these follies? Come and take tea with me this afternoon; I will then tell you more about it."

I promised, and he left.

* * * * *

Two evenings after this, thanks to an arrangement by letter, and the promise of an ample fee, I found Madame Vulpes awaiting me at her residence, alone. She was a coarse-featured woman, with keen and rather cruel dark eyes, and an exceedingly sensual expression about her mouth and under jaw. She received me in perfect silence, in an apartment on the ground floor, very sparsely furnished. In the centre of the room, close to where Mrs. Vulpes sat, there was a common round mahogany table.

"You come for a communication, Mr. Linley?" said the medium, in a dry, business-like tone of voice.

"By appointment—yes."

"What sort of communication do you want—a written one?"

"Yes; I wish for a written one."

"From any particular spirit?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever known this spirit on this earth?"

"Never. He died long before I was born. I wish merely to obtain from him some information, which he ought to be able to give better than any other."

"Will you seat yourself at the table, Mr. Linley," said the medium, "and place your hands upon it?"

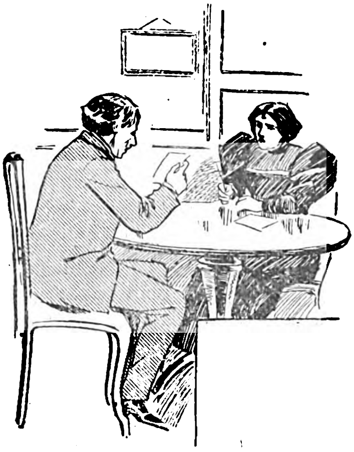
I obeyed, Mrs. Vulpes being seated opposite to me, with her hands on the table. We remained thus for about a minute and a half, when a violent succession of raps came on the table, on the back of my chair, on the floor immediately under my feet, even on the window panes. Mrs. Vulpes smiled composedly.

"They are very strong to-night," she remarked. "You are fortunate." She then continued: "Will the spirits communicate with this gentleman?"

Vigorous affirmative.

"Will the particular spirit he desires to speak with communicate?"

A very confused rapping followed this question.



I was astounded.

"I know what they mean," said Mrs. Vulpes, addressing herself to me; "they wish you to write down the name of the particular spirit you desire to converse with. Is that so?" she added, speaking to her invisible guests.

That it was so was evident from the numerous affirmative responses. While this was going on, I tore a slip from my pocket-book, and scribbled a name under the table.

"Will this spirit communicate in writing with this gentleman?" asked the medium once more.

After a moment's pause, her hand seemed to be seized with a violent tremor, shaking so forcibly that the table vibrated. She said that a spirit had seized her hand, and would write. I handed her some sheets of paper that were on the table, and a pencil. The latter she held loosely in her hand, which presently began to move over the paper with a singular and seemingly involuntary motion. After a few moments had elapsed, she handed me the paper, on which I found, in a large, uncultivated hand, the words:

"I am here. Question me. Leeuwenhoek."

I was astounded. The name was identical with that I had written beneath the table, and carefully kept concealed. Neither was it at all probable that an uncultivated woman like Mrs. Vulpes should know even the name of the great father of microscopy. I wrote on my slip—still concealing it from Mrs. Vulpes—a series of questions, which, to avoid tediousness, I shall place with the responses in the order which they occurred:

I: "Can the microscope be brought to perfection?"

Spirit: "Yes."

I: "Am I destined to accomplish this great task?"

Spirit: "You are."

I: "I wish to know how to proceed to attain this end."

Spirit: "A diamond of one hundred and forty carats, submitted to electro-magnetic currents for a long period, will experience a rearrangement of its atoms *inter se*, and from that stone you will form the universal lens."

I: "But the refractive power of the diamond is so immense that the image will be formed within the lens. How is that difficulty to be surmounted?"

Spirit: "Pierce the lens through its axis, and the difficulty is obviated. The image will be formed in the pierced space, which will itself serve as a tube to look through. Now I am called. Farewell."

I cannot at all describe the effect that these extraordinary communications had upon me. I felt completely bewildered. No biological theory could account for the *discovery* of the lens. The medium might, by means of biological *rapport* with my mind, have gone so far to read my questions, and reply to them coherently. But biology could not enable her to discover that magnetic currents would so alter the crystals of the diamond as to remedy its previous defects, and admit of its being polished into a perfect lens.

In my excited condition of mind there was no course left but to become a convert, and it was in a state of the most painful nervous exaltation that I left the medium's house that evening.

I walked home with but one thought possessing me—how to obtain a diamond of the immense size required. My entire means multiplied a hundred times over would have been inadequate to its purchase. Besides, such stones are rare, and become historical. I could find such only in the regalia of Eastern or European monarchs.

* * * *

There was a light in Simon's room as I entered my house. A vague impulse urged me to visit him. As I opened the door of his sitting-room unannounced, he was bending with his back towards me, over a lamp, apparently engaged in minutely examining some object which he held in his hands. As I entered he started suddenly, thrust his hand into his breast pocket, and turned to me with a face crimson with confusion.

"What!" I cried, "poring over the miniature of some fair lady? Well, don't blush so much; I won't ask to see it."

Simon laughed awkwardly enough, but made none of the negative protestations usual on such occasions. He asked me to take a seat.

"Simon," said I, "I have just come from Madame Vulpes."

This time Simon turned as white as a sheet, and seemed stupefied, as if a sudden electric shock had smitten him. He babbled some incoherent words, and went hastily to a small cupboard where he usually kept his liquors. Although astonished at his emotion, I was too preoccupied with my own idea to pay much attention to anything else.

I continued: "Simon, Madame Vulpes told me wonderful things to-night, or, rather, was the means of telling me wonderful things. Ah, if I could only get a diamond that weighed a hundred and forty carats!"

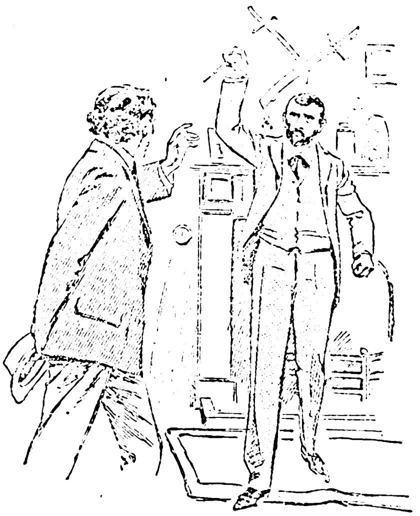
Scarcely had the sigh with which I uttered this desire died upon my lips, when Simon, with the aspect of a wild beast, glared at me savagely, and, rushing to the mantelpiece, where some foreign weapons hung on the wall, caught up a sharp-pointed dagger, and brandished it furiously before him.

"No!" he cried in French, into which he always broke when excited. "No! you shall not have it! You are perfidious; you have consulted with that demon, and desire my treasure! But I will die first!"

All this, uttered in a loud voice trembling with excitement, astonished me. I saw at a glance that I had accidentally trodden upon the edges of Simon's secret, whatever it was. It was necessary to reassure him.

"My dear Simon," I said, "I am entirely at a loss to know what you mean. I went to Madame Vulpes to consult with her on a scientific problem, to the solution of which I discovered that a diamond of the size I just mentioned was necessary. You were never alluded to during the evening, nor, as far as I was concerned, even thought of. What can be the meaning of this outburst? If you happen to have a set of valuable diamonds in your possession you need fear nothing from me. The diamond which I require you could not possess; or, if you did possess it, you would not be living here."

Something in my tone must have completely reassured him, for his expression changed to a sort of constrained merriment, combined, however, with a certain suspicious attention to my movements. He laughed, and said that I must bear with him; that he was at certain moments subject to a species of vertigo, which betrayed itself in incoherent speeches, and that the attacks passed off as rapidly as they came. He put his weapon aside while making his explanation, and endeavoured, with some success, to assume a more cheerful air.



Brandished it furiously before him.

All this did not impose on me in the least. I was too much accustomed to analytical labours to be baffled by so flimsy a veil. I determined to probe the mystery to the bottom.

"Simon," I said gaily, "let us forget all this over a bottle of Burgundy. I have a case downstairs, fragrant with the odours and ruddy with the sunlight of the Côte d'Or. Let us have a couple of bottles. What say you?"

"With all my heart," answered Simon smilingly.

I produced the wine, and we seated ourselves to drink. It was of a famous vintage, that of 1848, a year when war and wine throve together, and its pure but powerful juice seemed to impart renewed vitality to the system. By the time we had half finished the second bottle Simon's head, which I knew was a weak one, had begun to yield, while I remained calm as ever, only that every draught seemed to send a flush of vigour through my limbs.

Fixing my eyes on him with a quiet smile, I said:

"Simon, I have deceived you; I learnt your secret this evening. You may as well be frank with me. Mrs. Vulpes, or rather one of her spirits, told me all."

He protested with maudlin earnestness that I was entirely mistaken, that I was intoxicated; then asked me to swear eternal secrecy, and promised to disclose the mystery to me. I pledged myself, of course, to all. With an uneasy look in his eyes, and hands unsteady with drink and nervousness, he drew a small case from his breast, and opened it. Heavens! How the mild lamplight was shivered into a thousand prismatic arrows, as it fell upon a vast rose diamond that glittered in the case!

I was no judge of diamonds, but I saw at a glance that this was a gem of rare size and purity. I looked at Simon with wonder, and—must I confess it?—with envy. How could he have obtained this treasure? In reply to my questions, I gathered that he had been superintending a gang of slaves engaged in diamond washing in Brazil; that he had seen one of them secrete a diamond weighing exactly a hundred and forty carats, but, instead of informing his employers, had quietly watched the negro until he saw him bury his treasure; that he had dug it up, and fled with it, but that as yet he was afraid to attempt to dispose of it publicly, so valuable a gem being almost certain to attract too much attention to its owner's antecedents, and he had not been able to discover any of those obscure channels by which such matters are conveyed away safely.

He added that, in accordance with oriental practice, he had named his diamond with the fanciful title of "The Eye of the Morning."

I sat opposite to him while he nodded over his glass, and calmly thought over the whole affair. I did not for an instant contemplate so foolish an act as a common theft, which would of course be discovered, or at least necessitate flight and concealment, all of which must interfere with my scientific plans. There was but one step to be taken—to kill Simon. After all, what was the life of a miserable Frenchman in comparison with the interests of science? This man Simon was, by his own confession, a criminal, a robber, and I believed in my heart a murderer. He deserved death quite as much as any felon condemned by the laws; why should not I, like government, contrive that his punishment should contribute to the progress of human knowledge?

The means for accomplishing everything I desired lay within my reach. There stood upon the mantelpiece a bottle half full of laudanum. Simon was so occupied with his diamond, which I had just restored to him, that it was an affair of no difficulty to drug his glass. In a quarter of an hour he was in a profound sleep.

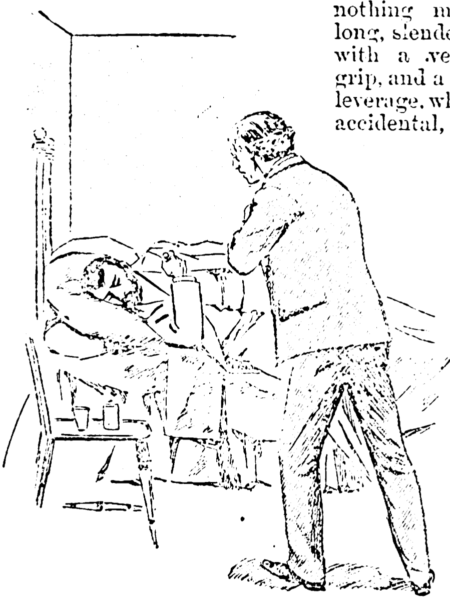
I now opened his waistcoat, took the diamond from the inner pocket in which he had placed it, and removed him to the bed, on which I laid him so that his feet hung down over the edge. I had possessed myself of the dagger, which I held in my right hand, while with the other I discovered as accurately as I could by pulsation the exact locality of the heart.

It was essential that all the aspects of his death should lead to the surmise of self-murder. I calculated the exact angle at which it was probable that the weapon, if levelled by Simon's own hand, would enter his breast. Then with one powerful blow I thrust it up to the hilt in the very spot which I had desired to penetrate.

A convulsive thrill ran through Simon's limbs. I heard a smothered sound issue from his throat; he turned half-round on his side, and, as if to assist my plans more effectually, his right hand, moved by some mere spasmodic impulse, clasped the handle of the weapon, which it remained holding with extraordinary muscular tenacity. Beyond this there was no apparent struggle. The laudanum, I presume, paralysed the usual nervous action. He must have died instantly.

There was yet something to be done. To make it certain that all suspicion of the act should be diverted from any inhabitant of the house to Simon himself, it was necessary that the door should be found in the morning *locked on the inside*. How to do this, and afterwards escape myself? Not by the window; that was a physical impossibility. Besides, I was determined that the windows also should be found bolted.

The solution was simple enough. I descended softly to my own room for a peculiar instrument which I had used for holding small slippery substances, such as minute spheres of glass, etc. This instrument was nothing more than a long, slender hand-vice, with a very powerful grip, and a considerable leverage, which last was accidental, owing to the shape of the handle. Nothing was simpler than, when the key was in the lock, to seize the end of its stem in this vice, through the keyhole, from the outside, and so lock the door.



Clasped the handle of the weapon.

Previously, however, to doing this, I burnt a number of papers on Simon's hearth. Suicides almost always burn papers before they destroy themselves. I also emptied some more laudanum into Simon's glass—having first removed from it all traces of wine—cleaned the other wine-glass, and brought the bottles away with me. If traces of two persons drinking had been found in the room, the question naturally would have arisen: "Who was the second?" Besides, the wine bottles might have been identified as belonging to me.

The laudanum I poured out to account for its presence in the stomach, in case of a post-mortem examination. The theory naturally would be that he first intended to poison himself, but, after swallowing a little of the drug, was either disgusted with its taste, or changed his mind from other motives, and chose the dagger. These arrangements made, I walked out, leaving the gas burning, locked the door with my vice, and went to bed.

Simon's death was not discovered till nearly three in the afternoon. The servant, astonished at seeing the gas burning—the light streaming on the dark landing from under the door—gave the alarm. The door was burst open, and the neighbourhood was in a fever of excitement.

There was an inquest, but no clue to his death beyond that of suicide could be obtained. The jury, after a prolonged examination, brought in the usual verdict, and the neighbourhood once more settled down into its accustomed quiet.

* * * * * *

Three months succeeding Simon's catastrophe, I devoted night and day to my diamond lens. I had constructed a vast galvanic battery, composed of nearly two thousand pairs of plates—a higher power I dared not use, less the diamond should be calcined. By means of this enormous engine I was enabled to send a powerful current of electricity continually through my great diamond which, it seemed to me, gained in lustre every day.

At last the eventful moment came; the lens was completed. I stood trembling on the threshold of new worlds. I had the realisation of Alexander's famous wish before me. The lens lay on the table, ready to be placed upon its platform. My hand fairly shook as I enveloped a drop of water with a thin coating of oil of turpentine, preparatory to its examination, a process necessary in order to prevent the rapid evaporation of the water. I now placed a drop on a thin slip of glass under the lens, and throwing upon it, by the combined aid of a prism and a mirror, a powerful stream of light, I applied my eye to the minute hole drilled through the axis of the lens.

For an instant I saw nothing save what seemed to be an illuminated chaos—a vast luminous abyss. A pure white light, cloudless and serene, and seemingly limitless as space itself, was my first impression. Gently, and with the greatest care, I depressed the lens a few hairs' breadths. The wondrous illumination still continued, but as the lens approached the object, a scene of indescribable beauty was unfolded to my view.

I seem to gaze upon a vast space, the limits of which extended far beyond my vision. An atmosphere of magical luminousness permeated the entire field of view. I was amazed to see no trace of animalculous life. Not a living thing, apparently, inhabited that dazzling expanse. I comprehended instantly that, by the wonderous power of my lens, I had penetrated beyond grosser particles of aqueous matter, beyond the realms of infusoria and protozoa, down to the original gaseous globule, into whose luminous interior I was gazing, as into an almost boundless dome filled with a supernatural radiance.

Far away into the illimitable distance stretched long avenues of these gaseous forests, dimly transparent, and painted with prismatic hues of unimaginable brilliancy. No hills, no lakes, no rivers, no forms, animate or inanimate, were to be seen save those vast auroral copses that floated serenely in the luminous stillness, with leaves, and fruits, and flowers, gleaming with unknown fires, unrealisable by mere imagination.

While I was speculating on the singular arrangements of the internal economy of Nature with which she so frequently splinters into atoms our most compact theories, I thought I beheld a form moving slowly through the glades of one of the prismatic forests.

It was a female human shape. When I say human, I mean it possessed the outlines of humanity; but there the analogy ends.

I cannot, I dare not, attempt to describe the charms of this divine revelation of perfect beauty. Her long, lustrous hair, following her glorious head in a golden wake, like the track sown in the Heavens by a falling star, seems to quench my most burning phrases with its splendours.

Breathless with gazing on this lovely wonder, and forgetful for an instant of everything save her presence, I withdrew my eye from the microscope eagerly—alas! As my gaze fell on the thin slide that lay beneath my instrument, the bright light from mirror and from prism sparkled on a colourless drop of water. There, in that tiny bead of dew, this beautiful being was for ever imprisoned. Neptune itself was not more distant from me than she. I hastened once more to apply my eye to the microscope.

Gracilia (let me call her by that name which I subsequently bestowed on her) had changed her position. She had again approached the wondrous forest, and was gazing upwards. The suppleness of her motions sent a thrill of delight through my frame; my heart beat madly as she turned her beautiful eyes in the direction of the spot in which I stood.

While I was thus breathlessly following her every movement, she suddenly started, seemed to listen for a moment, and then, cleaving the brilliant ether in which she was floating, like a flash of light pierced through the opaline forest, and disappeared.

Instantly a series of the most singular sensations attacked me. It seemed as if I had suddenly gone blind. The luminous sphere was still before me, but my daylight had vanished. The agony of my sensations as I arrived at this conclusion startled me. I tried to reject the conviction that my reason forced upon me. I battled against the fatal conclusion, but in vain. It was so. I had no escape from it. I loved an animalcule!

Could she but see me once! Could I for one moment pierce the mystical walls that so inexorably rose to separate us, and whisper all that filled my soul, I might consent to be satisfied for the rest of my life with the knowledge of her remote sympathy.

But it could not be. No invention of which human intellect was capable could break down the barriers that Nature had erected. I might feast my soul upon her wondrous beauty, yet she must always remain ignorant of the adoring eyes that day and night gazed upon her, and, even when closed, beheld her in dreams. With a bitter cry of anguish I fled from the room, and flinging myself on my bed, sobbed myself to sleep like a child.

* * * * * *

I rose the next morning almost at daybreak, and rushed to my microscope. I trembled as I sought the luminous world in miniature that contained my all. Gracilia was there. I had left the gas lamp, surrounded by its moderators, burning when I went to bed the night before. I found her, with an expression of pleasure animating her features in the brilliant light which surrounded her. She tossed her lustrous golden hair over her shoulders with innocent coquetry. I tried an experiment to satisfy myself if her powers of reflection were developed. I lessened the lamp-light considerably. By the dim light that remained, I could see an expression of pain flit across her face. She looked upward suddenly, and her brows contracted. I flooded the stage of the microscope again with a full stream of light, and her whole expression changed. She sprang forward like some substance deprived of weight. Her eyes sparkled and her lips moved.

* * * * * *

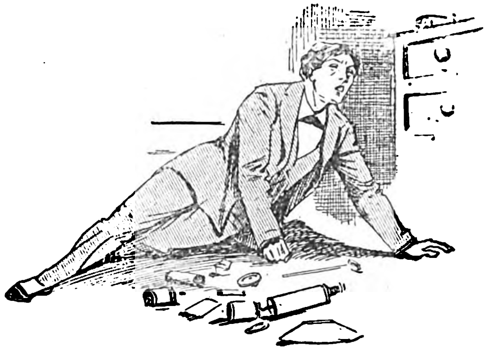
How long this worship of my strange divinity went on thus I scarcely know. I lost all note of time. All day, from early dawn and far into the night, I was to be found peering through that wonderful lens. I saw no one, went nowhere, and scarce allowed myself sufficient time for meals.

At length I grew so pale and emaciated from want of rest and continual brooding over my insane love and its cruel conditions that I determined to make some effort to wean myself from it. "Come," I said, "this is at best but a fantasy. Your imagination has bestowed on

Gracilia charms which in reality she does not possess. Seclusion from female society has produced this morbid condition of mind. Compare her with the beautiful women of your own world, and this false enchantment will vanish."

I looked over the newspapers by chance. There I beheld the advertisement of a celebrated *danseuse* who appeared nightly at the Alhambra. The Signorina Caradolce had the reputation of being the most beautiful as well as the most graceful woman on the stage. I instantly dressed and went to the theatre.

Heavens! was this the great enchantress that had drawn monarchs at her chariot-wheels? Those heavy, muscular limbs, those thick ankles, those cavernous eyes, that stereotyped smile, those crudely-painted cheeks! Where were the vermeil blooms, the liquid, expressive eyes, the harmonious limbs of Gracilia?



Lying amid the wreck of my instrument.

The Signorina danced. What gross, discordant movements! The play of her limbs was all false and artificial. Her bounds were painful athletic efforts; her poses were angular, and distressed the eye. I could bear it no longer. With an exclamation of disgust that drew every eye upon me, I rose from my seat in the very middle of the Signorina's *pas de fascination* and abruptly quitted the house.

I hastened home to feast my eyes once more on the lovely form of my sylph. I felt that henceforth to combat this passion would be impossible. I applied my eye to the lens. Gracilia was there—but what could have happened? Some terrible change seemed to have taken place during my absence. Some secret grief seemed to cloud the lovely features of her I gazed upon. Her face had grown thin and haggard; her limbs trailed heavily; the wondrous lustre of her golden hair had faded. She was ill—ill, and I could not assist her.

I racked my brain for the solution of this mystery. What was it that afflicted the sylph? She seemed to suffer intense pain. Her features contracted, and she even writhed as if with some internal agony. The wondrous forests appeared also to have lost half their beauty. Their hues were dim, and in some places faded away altogether. I watched her with a breaking heart, and she seemed absolutely to wither away under my very eye.

Suddenly I remembered that I had not looked at the water drop for several days. In fact, I hated to see it, for it reminded me of the natural barrier between Gracilia and myself. I hurriedly looked down on the stage of the microscope. The slide was still there, but —great Heavens!—the water-drop had vanished.

The awful truth burst upon me: it had evaporated until it became so minute as to be invisible to the naked eye; I had been gazing on its last atom, the one that contained Gracilia—and she was dying!

I rushed again to the front of the lens and looked through. Alas! the last agony had seized her. The rainbow-hued forests had all melted away, and Gracilia lay struggling feebly in what seemed to be a spot of dim light. Ah! the sight was horrible; the limbs once so round and lovely shrivelling up into nothing; the eyes —those eyes that shone like Heaven—being quenched into black dust; the lustrous golden hair, now lank and discoloured. The last throe came. I beheld that final struggle of the blackening form, and I fainted.

When I awoke out of a trance of many hours, I found myself lying amid the wreck of my instrument, myself as shattered in mind and body as it. I crawled feebly to my bed, from which I did not rise for months.

They say now that I am mad; but they are mistaken. I am poor, but I have neither the heart nor the will to work; all my money is spent, and I live on charity. Young Men's Associations that love a joke invite me to lecture on optics before them for which they pay me, and laugh at me while I lecture. "Lindley, the mad microscopist," is the name I go by. I suppose I talk incoherently while I lecture. Who could talk sense when his brain is haunted by such ghastly memories, while ever and anon among the shapes of death I behold the radiant form of my lost Gracilia?

J. O'B.

The Answer

BY MABEL MILLER.

"I HATE it, Bruno. I hate it."

She was a little girl, and her hands were doubled into aggressive-looking fists. A large shepherd dog, with coat as tawny as a young lion's, sat on the sand at her feet. "I'll tell you why I hate it;" this time the voice was so low that only Bruno's well-trained ear could have heard it above the breaking of the waves on the beach. "I'll tell you why I hate it—because it's so big, and cold, and shiny."

A large wave had thrown itself upon the sand; she reached down and dipped her hand in the ripples. "Ugh! Bruno, see how cold it is," and she thrust her wet fingers against his nose.

"That's father's boat," pointing to a sail fast nearing the horizon. "I know it, for I've watched it all the afternoon. You can't see the patched places in the sails now, because it's so far away. It's sailing on and on; and that's why I hate the sea, because it takes my father away." Bruno looked at his little mistress with a world of sympathy in his great brown eyes.

"Let's go up on the cliff, then we can see farther away. The sun isn't near the top of the trees yet. When it is, Aunt Kate will call us."

Together they climbed the cliff, and sat down on the highest hummock to watch the sail that was fast going out of sight. It was too near the horizon to remain a speck for a long time, and it was soon lost in the grey of the sky.

All the brightness was gone from the summer day. Could life hold a greater grief for the child? She threw herself upon the sand and sobbed aloud. The dog gave a low whine, crept close to his mistress, and stretched himself beside her.

"You needn't, Bruno," she said, as he thrust his nose against her face. "You're only a dog, and you don't know;" and between the sobs she kept repeating: "I hate it so! I hate it so!"

Gradually the sobs grew fainter. The sun slipped behind the western woods. Aunt Kate came to the door and called.

"Nita! Nita!" but there was no answer. The child and dog were too absorbed in their grief to think of anything else.

The wind that was stirring grew chilly as the sun went down. The dog crept closer to his mistress, and stretched a paw across her shoulders as if he would shield her from the cold.

"You needn't," she said, and then she lifted her head and sat up. "I'm going home now, but I'm going over by the 'Chamber Rock' first. You can come too, if you want to. I'll tell you what I'm going to do." She drew down his head, and putting her lips close to his ear, whispered: "I'm going to pray. We'll go across because it's nearer."

The dog got up and stretched himself with a solemn dignity. He had been to "Chamber Rock" many times with his young mistress, but never to pray.

It was not far across the "Point" to where the rocky coast opened into a tiny cove—the "Oven's Mouth" the fisher-folk called it.

On one side the rocks reached far into the sea, and piled themselves into the air. In the centre of the pile was the "Chamber," a tiny inclosure shut in on three sides by steep perpendicular rocks. The waves could not reach it; the wind passed over it; above it was the blue heaven, and in the heaven was God. Surely a prayer would reach Him from here, were it ever so short.

Nita's was so short that she repeated it twice, and then waited as if to give it time to reach the blue above. "Dear God, don't let my father go to sea any more. Please answer my prayer, for Jesus' sake."

"I feel just as if He's going to answer it," she said, as they started for home.

At the door Aunt Kate met them. "Mercy sakes! child, what has kept you out of doors so long? Your clothes are damp——" But there was something in the child's eyes that kept her from finishing.

"Well, I dunno's I blame her," she said, while she went about the supper, "no mother, and a father that's on the sea nine months in the year."

"Aunt Kate, where does it say we can move mountains in the Bible?" The plates and crockery had been washed, and Aunt Kate was knitting.

"Goodness! child, how you scared me! Say we can move mountains? I never heard of such a thing."

"Father reads about it."

"Well, I dunno—why! It's in the faith chapter, you mean. If that's it, it's the seventeenth chapter of Matthew."

Nita climbed up to the book-case and took a book from the top shelf. It was bound in dark leather, and the corners were worn to a soft grey. The gilt on the edge of the leaves was tarnished, and there was dust upon it. She blew the dust gently, and wiped the edges with a corner of her apron; then, because the oil lamp gave so little light, she brought the Bible over to the glare of the fire.

She was a poor reader, but she found the chapter, and read it right through.

Aunt Kate had been nodding. She roused herself up and said: "You had better go to bed, child; it's past eight o'clock."

"Yes, I'm going. Come, Bruno. Good-night, Aunt Kate. Call me early, 'cause I want to get up."

Aunt Kate followed her with a soft: "Well, I never!"

"It's mother's Bible," Nita explained when she had reached her room. "I like it better than the others, because the letters are bigger, and—because it was mother's. And I found the chapter about the mountain, Bruno. I'll read it to you, and then perhaps we can understand it better."

She put the lamp on the stand and sat down on the bed. The dog sprang up beside her and laid his head in her lap. He was interested in the seventeenth chapter of Matthew because his mistress cared to read to him.

When the chapter was finished the dog curled himself up on the mat by the door. The child said her prayers and went to bed, to dream that her father came home in a vessel with pearl sails and masts of gold, and he took her in his arms and said that he was never going to sea again.

* * * * * *

"I must begin this very day." Nita was braiding her hair, and Bruno was sitting on the rug, looking into her face with earnest brown eyes.

"I must learn to darn, and sew (I know how to knit now), and bake—to bake pies, Bruno. I can roll out the crust and put it on the plates for Aunt Kate, but I must learn to put it together. Aunt Kate will want to go home when father gets back, and I must know just how to keep house. There's a good deal to learn"—this with a sigh. "But it's for father, and he isn't going to sea any more. Won't we be glad, doggie?"

With that day began a new order of things. Domestic duties filled all the morning hours. Aunt Kate was not left to do the baking alone.

Often the cakes shaped themselves into crosses. Smarting blisters tortured the tender flesh, and sometimes hot tears left queer scars upon the pie-crust.

The afternoons were given to lighter tasks, as sewing, knitting, darning. Almost any afternoon, when the sun shone, the child and dog might be seen going across to the sandy opening near the "Chamber Rock." Nita would sit in the shadow and work, and Bruno would stretch himself at her feet, or make short runs after the birds that flew by.

As the days grew hotter, the fingers, unpractised to such tasks, often lagged. Nita liked to look at the clouds while she shaped day dreams and sifted the warm sand through her fingers.

But one day the little company started out early in the morning, Bruno with a basket in his teeth, and Nita following more slowly with a small package.

"It's no use," she said, when they had reached the sand and laid down their loads. "They make me want to play, and I just promised I wouldn't, if God would not let my father go to sea any more."

She opened the packages and took out twelve pasteboard boxes. They were of all sizes, from two inches in length to a foot. Some were regular boxes, others were made of scraps of board sewn together and covered with bits of bright paper. The covers were tied with pieces of string.

"I've marked the names on the top. I know they're only dolls, but I loved them, and I'm going to bury them here in the shade of the big rock. We'll smooth the graves over the top, and put some stones round them, so's we can tell where they are."

It was a strange burial, but who can say that the child's heart did not ache as she put away her treasures.

The days crept on: sunshiny July, sultry August. With the first week of September came a letter.

"From father, Bruno," and Nita danced about in her joy. "He's in Newport, and he's coming home, perhaps in two weeks, and he'll never go fishing any more." Her heart was so full of joy that it could not contain any more.

The days slipped by like shining beads pulled from a string; there were so many last things to do. And one day Aunt Kate said: "I shouldn't wonder if your father would be home to-morrow. To-day's the sixteenth, and he usually gets in just after the middle of the month."

How bright that to-morrow promised to be. The sky was so blue, and the water sparkled and dimpled beneath the kisses of the sun.

In the early afternoon white fluffy clouds began to scud across the sky. By-and-bye drops of rain splashed the window-panes. They had watched all day, but the patched sails had not come in sight. Bruno and Nita had watched from the "Point" until the rain drove them in.

A storm was brewing. At six o'clock the waves were beating wildly on the shore. The fog-bell on the island near sounded out a dismal note. The red revolving light in the lighthouse flashed its warning, and then left darkness in its wake, again its warning and left darkness behind.

Nita stood at the window and tried to peer into the darkness. Max, the son of a neighbour, called as he ran dripping by. He came back, pressed his face against the other side of the pane, and shouted: "The men are going to build some fires in the shelter of the rocks. We thought we heard a gun just now. A ship couldn't live long in a sea like that."

Nita thought of the ship in distress. Perhaps the captain had a little girl at home like herself. Her heart was full of tender pity for her. Perhaps she would never see her father again. She lighted her lamp and carried it up to her chamber window; this little ray might help to guide him through the darkness of the night.

She could hear the gun now as it sent out a dull boom-oom. Surely God would pity the little girl whose father was out on the angry water.

Still the storm raged on. Aunt Kate urged her to go to bed, but she pleaded to sit up a little longer.

It was in the bright sunshine of the early morning. The hungry waves had satisfied their appetite; the wind had conquered and was gone.

One of the neighbours came to the door—a fisherman who had often sailed with Nita's father. He could not trust himself to look at Aunt Kate. He pulled his tarpaulin lower over his face and drew the back of his hand across his eyes before he could speak.

"We think one of 'em was Ted's vessel, marm; there was two of 'em, one was like his. We found this on the beach; it washed ashore 'bout five o'clock this mornin'."

It was a small box with the initials E. J. G. burnt into the corner.

"There was a bucket with two X's cut in it, that's Ted's mark, and there was a piece of the figgerhead. I've sailed in the 'Wave Crest' too many times not to know it, marm. There hain't any bodies come ashore yet; if there is, we'll let you know."

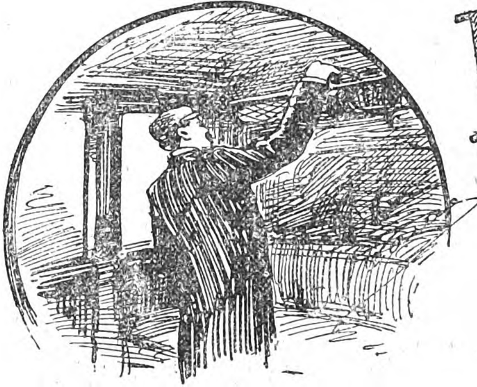
The man's voice faltered; he pulled a sixpence out of his pocket. "Give it to Nita," he said.

Aunt Kate stood with the box in her hand. She must tell the child, but how?

She went upstairs and opened the door of her room. Nita was dressed; she had not been in bed all night. She was sitting by the window, her head upon the sill, and the lamp beside her had burned the wick dry.

Weary with watching, she had fallen asleep. But her prayer was answered; her father would never go to sea again.

Exchange is No Robbery.



"YES, sir, I think I may say that, in an ordinary way, I am a careful man; have my regular little ways, as you may say, and do things in the same order one day after another. Now, you see this little black bag I'm carrying," holding up an ordinary brief bag, "well, I have carried this on and off for nearly a dozen years now, and I always make it a habit, wherever I may be, bus, tram, or train, to place it by my right side on the seat; it doesn't take up much room, you see, and it's nice to feel it handy like.

"Formerly, when in a train, I used to make it a rule to place it in the rack in front of me, a very good position you will admit; one can always have one's eye on it, as you may say, and it was only in consequence of a little misadventure, which occurred to me some years ago, that I determined once for all to change its position for the future.

"I ought to have told you, perhaps, that I was at the time employed as an auctioneer's clerk, and at the end of a day I often had a good bit of loose cash in my bag, and I was, as you may suppose, anxious to keep a sharp eye on it. Well, one day there had been a big sale on at a place down in the country, I needn't specify the exact locality, and at the close of the day I had in my bag a matter of between three and four thousand pounds, most of it in non-convertible cheques payable to order, but a matter of over £100 in gold, and a few notes.

"The governor and I set out for home, a big town in the Midlands, about seven o'clock, and at Lusley Junction who should he run across but a friend of his who had heard he was in the neighbourhood, so he said, and had looked in at the station in the hope of catching him on his way through. He had, he said, been asked to obtain an independent valuer for some miscellaneous property which was to be disposed of, between the relatives of a rich man lately deceased, on the following day, and suggested that, as it was still early, he might do the business that night, and sleep at his house, going home by the first train in the morning.

"The governor asked how long it would take, and on being informed the number of articles—principally heirlooms—decided that it would be best for me to stop and help him for a couple of hours, and then go on by the mail.

"'I will give you my latch-key,' he added, 'and then you can go to my house, let yourself in, and put the bag, just as it is, in the safe.'

"You will understand from this I was well in the governor's confidence, and although I say it myself, he had no reason other than to trust me.

"Well, the valuation was a longer job than we anticipated, there being a rare lot of stuff to go through, and it was getting on for eleven o'clock before we finished. As, however, the mail was not due till after midnight, the governor's friend very kindly suggested that I should have some supper before starting on my journey, the end of which I should not reach till about 2.30 a.m.

"I was nothing loth, you may be sure, having had a hard day's work and only time to snatch a hurried meal, as whilst the others were busily engaged in discussing a remarkably good lunch, I was for the most part of the time employed in making up my book of the morning sales, and checking off the amounts.

"Supper over, it was time for me to be off, and the governor having given me his keys, and said what time I might expect him at the office in the morning, saw me into a cab for the station, where I only arrived just as the mail came in. It was pretty full, I saw, but I noticed one carriage with an empty corner, and promptly took possession of it.

"I looked up to my regular place for putting my bag, but it was occupied with a lot of rugs, hand-bags, and things, and as the space above my head was vacant I put it there instead. In less than a minute the train started, and, knowing it would not stop again till Middlethorpe, I did what I admit I ought not to have done, dozed off to sleep.

"You must remember I had had a busy day, and was tired out. I am also never a heavy sleeper, and I felt sure that the slowing down of the train running into Middlethorpe would be sure to awake me. You see I had not allowed for the quick action of these new brakes they are using now on some of the main lines, and the result was there was no perceptible slowing down, but a quick, sharp stop, which made me wake up with a start, and in a dazed sort of way, wonder where I was.

"'Middlethorpe! Middlethorpe!!' the guard shouted; 'look sharp, please, if you are going to get out!'

"Instinctively I put up my hand to the rack in front of me, and took down my bag, as I thought, such is the force of habit; I couldn't make such a mistake, now of course, as a man's right side is his right side and you are not likely to forget it.

"Almost before I was clear of the carriage—I was the only passenger to alight as it happened—the guard blew his whistle and the train went steaming off Londonwards.

"I was glad to see there was a cab standing in the station-yard, for, although ours is an eminently quiet and respectable town, I did not fancy the idea of walking close on two miles with such a valuable cargo as I had with me. Telling the cabman where to drive to, I was not long in reaching the governor's house—one portion of which was set apart as an office. Then letting myself in I deposited the bag in the safe, and, feeling a heavy responsibility off my mind, went home to bed. My wife was waiting up for me in a sad state of excitement, as I had said I should be home by 11 p.m.

"I speedily set her mind at rest, and turned in to snatch a few hours' sleep before going to business in the morning. Punctually to time the next day the governor turned up, and I at once handed him over the keys, including that of the safe, which he opened and took out my bag.

"'Let me have your keys,' he said, and I handed him the bunch. 'Which is it?'

"'This one,' I replied, detaching it.

"'There's something in it,' he says, 'it won't turn.'

"Now, I am always most particular about my keys—being, as I have explained, a methodical man—and I asked to be allowed to try it myself. He was quite right, it wouldn't act. I got a pin and probed about for any bit of dirt there might be in it; but it was perfectly free, and I tried it in the lock again, but with the same result; it went in right enough, but failed to turn.

"Even then I had no suspicion of anything being wrong, and it was not until the governor said: 'Well, we must cut it open, that's all,' and proceeded to do so, that the true state of the case became revealed.

"Having effected a forcible entrance, what met our astonished gaze was not the bundle of cheques, notes, papers, and bags of gold and silver which I had carefully packed away, but a motley collection of jewellery and precious stones, all loosely wrapped up in tissue paper. One of these had burst open, and two or three diamonds rolled out on the desk in front of us.

"I shall never forget the governor's face as long as I live. Before he could speak the truth flashed in upon my mind. I had put *my* bag in the rack over my head in the train, and in my hurry of getting out had taken another, exactly similar in appearance, from the rack in front of me—force of habit, sir, force of habit.

"In as few words as possible, I explained the matter to the governor, and had the satisfaction of seeing that he did not disbelieve me.

"'These are a jeweller's samples, I suppose,' he said, taking up one or two of the trinkets and examining them; 'it's precious lucky for you to have hit upon such a bag. It might have been a patent medicine man's lot! I suppose they will be claimed before the day is out, and I shall get my own back. Funny way of carrying 'em, all loose,' he added, as having ripped the entire side of the bag open, he turned out the whole of the contents on the desk.

"'By Jove,' he went on, 'suppose they're all sham! Just run round to Mr. Amber, the jeweller, and ask him to come and see me for five minutes. And, I say, don't mention what for.'

"Mr. Amber was fortunately in his shop and disengaged, and presently returned with me.

"'Oh, I say, Amber, I have got some articles of jewellery here for valuation, and I don't know much about such things. What's this worth, about?' casually handing him a crescent-shaped diamond brooch.

"The jeweller examined it carefully for a minute, and replied: 'They are exceptionally fine stones, and I should say it's worth—for valuation purposes, I suppose,' with a quick glance—'three hundred pounds.'

"'Oh, then it's all right,' with a sigh of relief, 'I was afraid it might be paste, they make such good imitations nowadays; I've got one or two more things here, but I only wanted a general idea, and I won't bother you to examine the rest, much obliged to you for coming over;' after a little more conversation the jeweller took his departure.

"As soon as he had gone the governor turned to me and said: 'Do you know, Dixon, I don't think these are samples at all, I fancy they are the proceeds of some robbery?'

"'Good Heavens, sir, I hope——'

"'No; I don't suspect you for a moment; you have been very careless, but we must go further into this matter. The police must know about it at once; I'll just go round to the station.'

"In less than ten minutes he returned with the chief of the local detective staff.

"'Now, Mr. Dixon, just tell Mr. Tripp all you can remember about your last night's companions.'

"I did so to the best of my ability, the officer listening attentively without saying a word.

"'And now, sir, will you kindly let me see the stuff, please?'

"The officer's eyes sparkled with a brilliancy approaching that of the diamonds before him. Hastily drawing a printed paper from his pocket, he compared two or three of the articles with it.

"'By Jove, sir! you're in luck, there's a big reward offered for these things, which were stolen two days ago from the Countess of Yardsley's place; we only got it on the wire from London this morning—have you told anybody?'—anxiously.

"'I showed Mr. Amber that crescent just now, and mentioned I had received it for valuation.'

"'Good—couldn't be better—and now, sir, if you will allow me, I will take charge of this lot—you say all the cheques in the missing bag were crossed.'

"'Every one of them, but there was a matter of £200 or £300 in cash and notes.'

"'Never mind that, sir, there's a reward of £500 for this lot—now can you defer settling up with your clients for say a week?'

"'Yes, but I shall have to apprise the purchasers of their cheques being lost, so as to stop payment and obtain others.'

"'But suppose I can get 'em back and nobody the wiser; what then?'

"'But can you?'

"'Well, I can't say for certain, but I think I can, and if I do it will mean the best day's work I have ever done in my life. Just give me a sheet of paper, will you? Thanks!' as the governor handed it to him, and he rapidly wrote something down. 'That'll fetch 'em, I think!'

Will the gentleman who on Friday night last took a small black bag in mistake for his own, kindly return the same to the owner whose initials G. D. and address he will find inside, when his own will be returned to him.

"'I shall put this in the *Telegraph* and the *Standard*, and I lay we get an answer within a couple of days."

"'But don't you think the fellow will smell a rat?'

"'A deal more likely he'll think to himself that G. D. doesn't know the value of the stuff he's got, and if he did would be afraid to try and turn it into money, or if he does suspect a trap and doesn't reply, in any case you will be all right; you can easily get duplicate cheques, I suppose, as the others can't be cashed, and the £500 reward will more than cover your loss, so that in any case you must be on the right side—and if it comes off I'm a made man.'

* * * * * *

"'Telegram for Mr. Dixon.'

"'Sorry to have taken your bag in mistake for my own, containing samples, last night; am bringing it down next train.—Watson, Oresleigh and Co.'

"I handed over the telegram to the detective. His face was a study. 'Well, for downright impudence, this wins it—Watson, Oresleigh and Co., that's the big firm of jewellers in Bond Street—and Mr. Watson proposes to represent himself as their traveller, of course. Well, I am—let's see,' looking at the wire again, 'where it was handed in; Bond-street, W., 9.33 a.m. By Jove! he's not forgotten much, and if your suspicions hadn't been aroused, sir, his bold scheme might have come off. Now, then, what time is the next train due from London? 11.45; I shall just have time to run over to the station, get a couple of men, and be back again before he comes. Where can I hide myself, by the way? There's that hat and coat cupboard. Yes'—looking in—'that'll do capitally, and one of my men can be just inside your private office, sir, and I will have another in a cab round the corner.'

"Half an hour later, one of the men, whom I recognised as having been in the same carriage, and my *vis-à-vis* passenger overnight, came hurriedly into the office.

"'You got my wire?' he said anxiously.

"'I am glad to say I did. I was in an awful stew about the loss of my bag.'

"'Not more than I was, I can tell you, when I got to the shop this morning and found out my mistake. I made a clean breast of it to the head of the firm, and at once wired you.'

"'Here's your bag. I think you will find the contents all safe; will you kindly let me have mine?'

"'I am sorry to say, as my key would not fit it, I cut it open in the hopes of discovering the owner, but you will find everything there, I think. Just cast your eye over them to make sure, please, and if you will give me a receipt, I will do the same.'

"'Certainly,' was the reply, and having made a hurried examination of the various packages, he had the effrontery to take out his pocket-book, and, producing therefrom a printed memo headed Oresleigh and Co., Bond Street, W., proceeded to write out the required receipt, which he was in the act of handing to me, when the detective, who had noiselessly slipped out of the cupboard, quietly took possession of it, at the same time saying: 'This will come in handy later on, Mr. Watson.'

"The fellow saw he was caught, and turned to the door only to be confronted by another constable, whilst the third seized him from behind.

"'Nabbed after all—well, it was worth risking,' was his nonchalant remark.

"In less than a minute he was safely placed in the cab waiting outside. With trembling fingers I opened the bag he had left on the counter—my own bag this time—and examined the contents—a glance showed me they were as I had left them.

* * * * * *

"Mr. Watson got seven years. Mr. Tripp was complimented by the Judge on his astuteness, and, better than all, the governor treated me real handsome, and didn't give me the sack; but I am very careful now as to where I put my bag, you may be sure."

S. J. F. Newbery.

SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT.

THE Xmas No. OF Pearson's Weekly,

Which will be ready Wednesday, Nov. 13th.

JUST LOOK AT THE ATTRACTIONS IT WILL CONTAIN.

Three Magnificent Coloured Plates, each of which is, to use an Irishism, better than the others.

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The Queen of Night.

By HEADON HILL,

Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," "The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.

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SUMMARY.

Gaston Vizard gives to Sir Simon Crawshay an introduction to the agent of the vessel *Queen of Night*, in order that he may make special arrangements with regard to the trip of his wealthy ward, Miss Challenor. Dr. Zavertal calls on Vizard, and informs him that a new captain will be wanted before the next cruise.

The *Queen of Night*, under the guise of a popular pleasure boat, is used in reality by a set of unscrupulous adventurers for the purpose of doing away with objectionable relatives.

In Chapter I. Cyril Forrester receives his dismissal from the Flower Steamship Company for breaking the regulations while saving the life of Miss Aline Challenor. He applies for and obtains from Nathan and Co., of Fenchurch Street, the vacant command of the ocean yacht *Queen of Night*.

Becoming engaged to Miss Challenor (who comes in for a quarter of a million on attaining her majority), he obtains an interview with Sir Simon Crawshay, who promptly refuses a consent to his engagement, and informs him that his ward will be out of his way for the next six weeks, as she is about to take a cruise on board the *Queen of Night!* On going aboard he is introduced to Dr. Zavertal, among whose patients are Miss Challenor, the Earl of Darranmore (a boy of fourteen coming into £40,000 a year), and Desmond Orlebar, whose death however occurs when off Gibraltar.

A stowaway is discovered and put ashore. A well-known detective, Kennard, travelling as an American, "Gen. Waldo," reveals himself to Captain Forrester, and imparts his suspicions. At Genoa a passenger comes aboard, who is recognised as Vizard, and also to be the stowaway! Captain Forrester refuses to take him on the yacht. He receives an urgent letter from Zavertal, requiring his presence at the British Consulate. He goes, and is kidnapped and thrown into the convent of Santa Lucia. Kennard visits him in disguise, and gives him a rope and tools to escape with.

CHAPTER XIV.

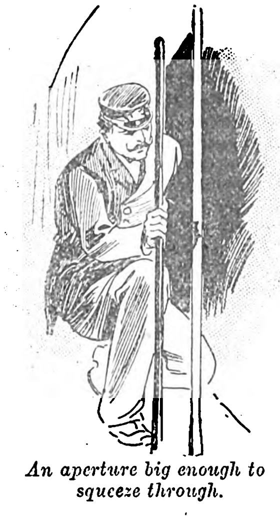
The Man at the Buffet.

So the clergyman was none other than our versatile American passenger in a new disguise! I should certainly never have penetrated it, and even now I was not sure whether my late visitor, "the newly appointed English chaplain," was Kennard himself or an emissary.

Speculation on this head was futile, for the blessed fact remained that I was possessed of the means of escape, and my first act was to conceal the articles about my person, lest they should be unearthed by the wretches whom I could now truly describe as "keepers." In the course of bestowing the things about me I made the welcome discovery, which in my excitement I had omitted to look for before, that my pocket-book, containing between seventy and eighty pounds in English money, was still in my possession. On the other hand my knife had been taken away—two facts which spoke either of a *bonâ fide* belief in my madness on the part of the proprietor of the asylum, or of an intention to "go through" me again.

My watch, which had also been left to me, told that there were still four hours to wait before I could commence operations, and slowly the time dragged, indeed. During the interval I had two more visits from the unwashed trio who acted as warders—once to supply me with supper, and lastly to see that all was secure for the night. It was not till after they had left me some time on the second occasion that, the sun having now set, I began the attack on the window.

By raising the narrow truckle bed on end I improvised a ladder which enabled me to work on the bars without having to hang on with one hand, and I then brought the file into play. Every now and then some distant noise in the building would cause me to stop and listen in fear lest the steady rasping I was obliged to make had attracted attention; but no one came my way, and in an hour and a half from commencing I had an aperture big enough to squeeze through.



An aperture big enough to squeeze through.

To make fast the cord and swing myself down was easy work to a sailor, and in a very few minutes I had crossed the tangled garden and reached the angle of the boundary wall without meeting a soul or hearing a sound to denote that my flight was discovered. A hasty examination of the wall proved it to be so rugged with age that there was easy foothold. I was up and over in no time, to find myself standing in a dark tree-bordered lane, and I had hardly touched ground when a figure emerged from the gloom.

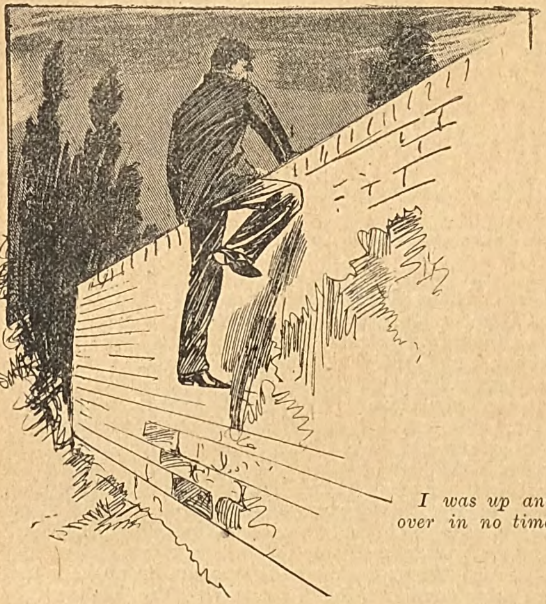
"Is that Forrester?" came in the welcome tones of Kennard's natural voice, but almost whispered.

"Yes, thanks to you, here I am," I replied thankfully, scarcely breathing.

"Not a word more till we are beyond range of pursuit," he proceeded. "Follow me." And leading the way along the lane he turned into a field which we crossed till we came to a disused barn. Having drawn me inside and shut the door Kennard lit a candle, and, searching under a pile of straw, produced a bundle of clothes. "There," he said, tossing it to me, "we can talk now without danger of being overheard. In the eye of the Italian law you are an escaped lunatic and liable to recapture; but if you will get into that toggery while I spin my yarn I hope to be able to steer you out of Genoa without trouble. It is not the police we have to fear, but a treacherous hound whom I have a pretty shrewd suspicion is our friend the stowaway."

"You mean Vizard? You have seen him?" I exclaimed.

"So. You have had an opportunity of recognising the stowaway's voice, and it was as I expected?" replied Kennard eagerly. "In that case," he continued, "you had better 'take the floor' first, and run through the heads of what has happened to you since we met last. But get into those clothes while we talk. There is no time to spare."



I was up and over in no time.

It will be remembered that Kennard went ashore to look after Zavertal, and had therefore not been on board the *Queen of Night* when Vizard made his appearance. So it was at that point that I began, and while transforming myself I recapitulated the incidents that preceded my visit to the Consulate. Sitting on a truss of straw in the flickering candle light, Kennard heard me to the end without remark. Then he said:

"Your experience fits in with mine thoroughly, and clears up the only point that was puzzling me—how the Consul was fooled into playing into their hands. You acted a little too much on impulse, my friend. You have to thank your high-handed treatment of Vizard for the rough time you have been having. It would have been better to have played possum, and not to have let on that you recognised him when he so obviously showed that he wanted you to do so. Why, he went on board—I can see plainly—with the express purpose of provoking you into refusing him a passage."

"How so?" I asked, quite believing him, but still mystified as to motives.

"Simply because your assertion, that a wealthy passenger, *who produced evidence that he was in London three days ago,* was a stowaway landed at Barcelona, convinced the Consul that the allegation of lunacy which Zavertal was bringing against you was correct. But, listen," proceeded Kennard, "while I detail *my* experience. Zavertal had the start of me for the shore by ten minutes, but by bribing my boatmen I got them to spurt and reduce the distance between us so materially that I was landed soon enough to keep my man in view.

"He turned into the Via Vittore Emanuele, then sharp to the right up the Via San Lorenzo, and along the Piazza Deferrari to the Hôtel de Genes, thus proving that so far as his destination was concerned he had not lied. To speak the truth gratuitously was so unlike the man that I suspected a motive, and sure enough at the hotel entrance I found it. He passed into the hall, but instead of going on to the bureau to make his inquiries, he stationed himself just inside the swing-doors and waited, his object evidently being to ascertain if he had been followed by anyone from the ship.

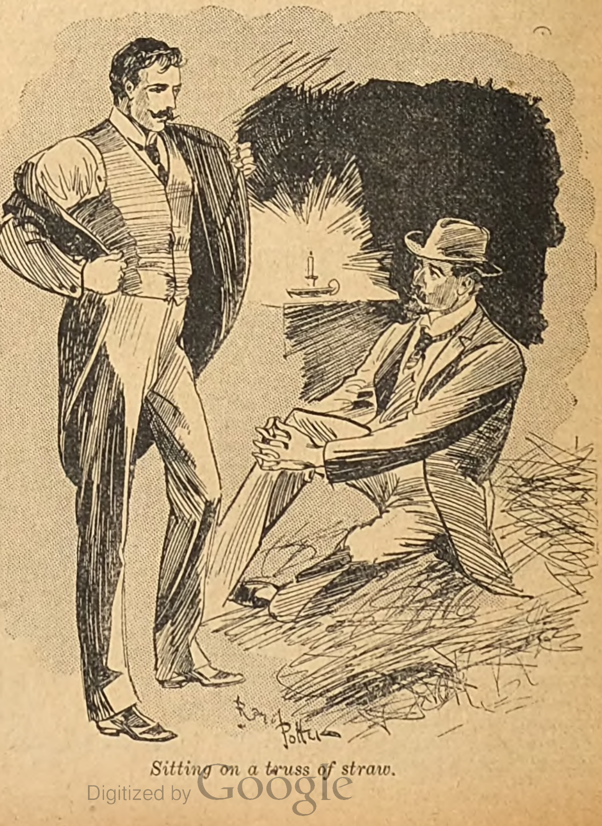
He must have expected such a person to give himself away by either coming on his heels into the hotel, or by looking through the doors after him, but he made a slight error. It is thirty years since I put in my apprenticeship at the elementary art of shadowing, and Doctor Zavertal had no notion that the seedy tout shambling quickly by was hot upon his trail.

"I went on as far as the corner of the Via Carlo Felice, and stood there for five minutes watching the doorway in case it was a dodge to slip away to some other rendezvous. But no sign of the quarry appearing, at the end of that time I walked back sharply past the hotel, and by a twist of my eye saw that he was no longer ambushed in the entrance. Once more I turned, and boldly entered the hall.

"You will probably give me a good deal more credit than I deserve for my next proceeding; for, though it may look smart on the surface, it was really only a chance shot based on information which you yourself gave me. I walked right up to the clerk at the bureau, and asked him the number of Mr. Vizard's room."

"Good Heavens," I exclaimed, "how did you arrive at that?"

"I argued it out that, from your showing, Zavertal had a previous acquaintance with Vizard, which he wished to conceal; that Vizard's reference to 'the cursed American,' and 'taking risks,' which you repeated to me the other day as overheard by you, might have meant my contemplated trip, that he intended to go in the ship in order to help his friend thwart any designs I might have, and that as he had mysteriously thrown up his passage at the last moment, he might, nevertheless, have acted precisely as I did, and have come on board in an assumed character.



Sitting on a truss of straw.

"From that, my mind was naturally led to the stowaway and to the manner in which he was set free from his hiding-place by Zavertal putting young Darranmore up to concealing himself in the launch. I got fairly gripped with the idea that if I was right Vizard would come on by rail and catch us up here.

"I was, therefore, not surprised when the clerk gave away the situation by asking: 'Who are you, and what do you want to know?' I told him—speaking, of course, in Italian—that I had been employed to procure some opera tickets by the Signor who had just gone up to Mr. Vizard's room, and that I had been instructed to deliver them there. Luckily, further questioning was stopped by a guest coming to make inquiries of the clerk. Turning to attend to the new-comer, he promptly got rid of me by naming the number of the room—14, on the first floor.

"I found the room on the main landing, close to the head of the staircase, in one of the best positions in the house; but the door was shut, and there were too many people about in the corridors for eavesdropping in the open. I was so impressed with the necessity of overhearing their conversation, if possible, that I chanced it, and, ready with an excuse and an apology if wanted, entered the next room—to find it, as I had scarcely dared to hope, unoccupied. It was not long, I can assure you, before my ear was glued to the wall separating me from No. 14.

"To my disgust the partition was too thick to admit of hearing any sustained conversation, but certain names and disjointed sentences reached me, which by the light of what has happened since, and taken in conjunction with my previously formed suspicions, greatly tend to confirm the latter.

"The first words I made out were in the voice that I know now to be Vizard's natural tone: 'Consul notoriously obstinate. Once decided, never allow he was wrong.'

"Then, after an interval, Zavertal's voice, said: '*Alibi* easily managed. A wire to Nathan would settle that,' to which I caught the direct reply: 'Let it be so, then; I will get on board at once.'

"After another break, in which their words were inaudible, Zavertal said: 'Pietro Mascagni, of the Saint Lucia Convent, is our man. A couple of hundred will insure a quietus for the meddlesome dolt.'

"Then, with further lengthy intervals of indistinct mutterings, I caught the following words and phrases:

"*Zavertal*: 'Darranmore, after leaving Naples.'

"*Vizard*: 'All goes well could rejoin you at Alexandria.'

"*Zavertal*: 'No signs of Kennard.'

"*Vizard*: (Part of direct reply to the last) '——not do to make too sure. He might join the ship at any port of call.'

"And then, Forrester," Kennard proceeded, rising from the straw, and putting his hand kindly on my shoulder, "I caught a sentence—the last I overheard—which I would not repeat to you if I hadn't confidence in your nerve. Of course, I have not been so blind as not to notice what every-one on the ship noticed—your relations with the belle of the voyage."

"Good God!" I exclaimed; "then the fiends *are* scheming against Aline! Yes," I added, "you may safely tell me. I shall not hamper you with hysterics."

"Well, then," said Kennard, "the last broken sentence that reached me was in Zavertal's voice: '*The Challenor affair in the run from Alexandria to Malta.*'"

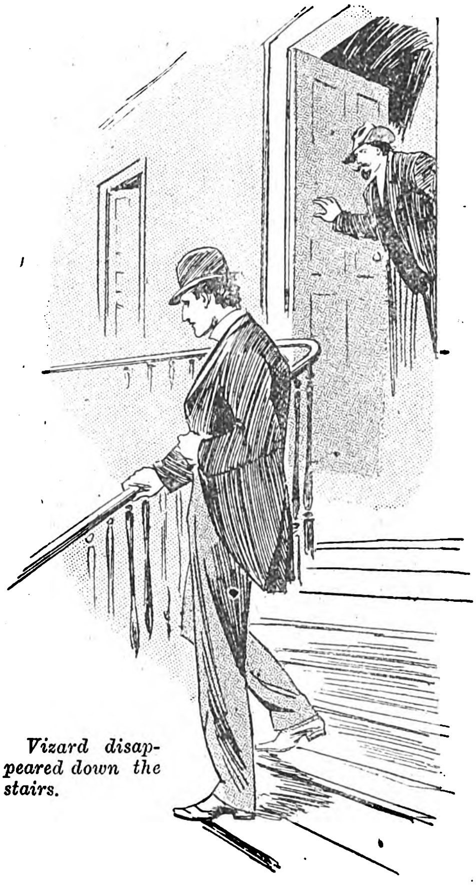
"And we are stranded here," I groaned. "Tell me, though—I wonder I have not asked before—how long is it since I was captured?"

"Only this morning," replied Kennard; "and look here, Forrester," he went on, "the time is not come for despair yet. It might be a good deal worse. We know, at any rate, that whatever tricks they mean to play with Lord Darranmore are postponed till after the ship leaves Naples. That must be three days ahead at least, and long before then, with any luck, we shall be within hail of the *Queen of Night*. And what they politely call 'the Challenor affair,' is not to come off till after the ship has visited Alexandria, which allows a wide margin in case of any miscarriage at Naples.

"But let me finish my story. After the last words that reached me there was a continuous buzz of talk for a quarter of an hour, then the sound of movement, and a minute later I heard the door of No. 14 open, and someone go towards the staircase. I was at the door of No. 13 in time to see that it was a tall man—just the build of 'Enriquez,' by the way—and not for a moment to be mistaken for Zavertal, who had clearly remained behind to prevent being seen with his friend, in case they were being watched.

"I was immediately confronted with the dilemma which of the two to shadow, and as I knew a lot against the Doctor, and had nothing but suspicion against the other, I decided to stay and keep an eye on Zavertal. I think now that I was wrong, and that I should have done better by following Vizard on board, for in that case you would never have fallen into this trap.

"Vizard disappeared down the stairs, and I withdrew into the vacant room till Zavertal came out of No. 14, when I started on the chase again. Outside the hotel he hailed a *carroza* and drove to the convent of Santa Lucia, I following in another cab. He remained close on an hour, and I was unable to find out what had transpired, though I now know that he must have been arranging for your capture, detention, and, very likely, for your murder, in the event of the Consul being hoodwinked into treating you as a lunatic unfit to command the ship.



Vizard disappeared down the stairs.

"When he left the convent he drove back to the neighbourhood of the Hôtel de Gênes, and for the rest of the evening I was dodging him in various restaurants, where his sole object appears to have been to kill time till Vizard should rejoin him after being turned out of the ship by you. This occurred about nine o'clock, the meeting taking place outside the hotel, after which they walked off to the telegraph office in the Palazzo Ducale—I guess for the purpose of cabling Nathan to wire out that Vizard was in London three days ago.

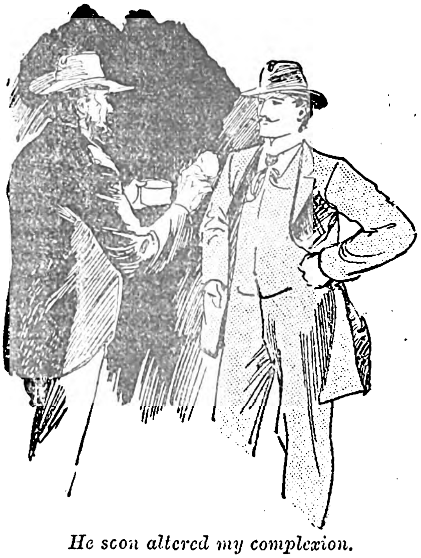
"From the telegraph office they returned to the hotel, and as I was able to ascertain that the doctor had engaged a bed, and that they had both retired to their rooms, I went to spend the night at a neighbouring inn in order to be ready for them in the morning. After breakfast the pair came out together, boldly this time, and went together to the Consulate, where they remained till half an hour after I had witnessed your arrival from a shop opposite.

"Unfortunately there had been nothing in what I had overheard to indicate that *you* were to be the victim of a plot, and I had no notion of what was going on till I saw you driven away insensible by the superintendent of the asylum and his assistants. After I had shadowed Vizard back to the hotel, Zavertal having parted with him on the quay to return to the ship, I made some inquiries which showed that it would be hopeless to approach the Consul, so satisfied was he of your condition, and I at once set about procuring your escape in my own way. And now, when I have touched up your face a little, we will get on to the station, and catch the first train to the south."

Drawing an actor's make-up box from his bag, he soon altered my complexion to suit the clothes I had put on, and after making my own clothes into a bundle, we started towards the city. Kennard got over the difficulty of my not knowing a word of the language by arranging that I should feign to be dumb. Before relapsing into silence I asked him what he thought of Vizard's remaining in Genoa.

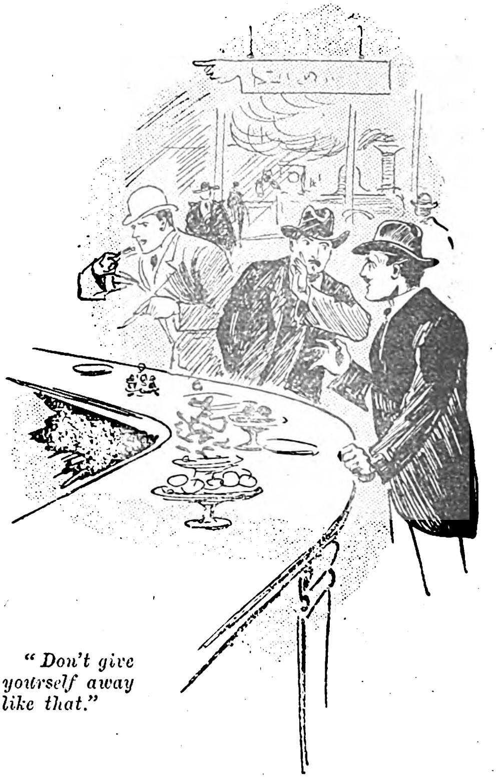
"He is here to look after you," was the reply, "and I should not be surprised if he has heard of your escape already. I surmise that we have a dangerous organisation of educated criminals to deal with, and that Nathan is in it. But I shall know more to-morrow."

This was lively hearing, when I had been relying on an appeal to my employers to reinstate me in my command, and turn the tables on Zavertal! But it was no use whining over the loss of a berth when I was about to pit myself against him in a game where the issues loomed up so much more terrible. I had no thought but to prevent and expose those conspiring scoundrels, and if, indeed, lives were at stake, to save their intended victims.



He soon altered my complexion.

We reached the Stazione Brignole, with a quarter of an hour to spare before the 11.40 night train to the south was due, and after Kennard had taken tickets for Naples, being fatigued and hungry, we went into the buffet for a snack. The place was full of travellers fortifying themselves for the long run to Pisa and we had some difficulty in squeezing up to the counter, but we managed it at last, and Kennard did the ordering.



"Don't give yourself away like that."

A long mirror stretched the length of the buffet opposite to us, reflecting the people at the counter, and glancing along the line of faces while waiting to be served I started so violently as to nearly capsize an old lady behind me. Within a few feet from us stood Vizard, apparently absorbed in dissecting the wing of a fowl.

CHAPTER XV.

Red Heart and Black Arrow.

Half fascinated, I was continuing to gaze at Vizard's face in the mirror when I felt a touch on my shoulder, and looking round caught Kennard's warning eye.

"Don't give yourself away like that," he whispered. "Go out on to the platform. I will join you directly and bring your refreshments to you. He has not seen you yet, I think."

I slipped quietly from the counter out into the dimly-lighted platform, and waited anxiously for Kennard's coming in the darkest corner I could find. He was longer than I expected, but when he did appear I was able to guess from his manner that something important had occurred.

"I have been picking pockets; I will examine the plunder while you eat," was the astonishing remark with which he handed me a packet of sandwiches and a flask of wine. The moment I had relieved him of the provender he walked to the nearest flickering gas-jet and proceeded to scrutinise what looked like several visiting cards. When he had held them all up to the light in turn, and turned them over and over again, he came back to me, his keen eyes twinkling brightly in the gloom.

"I have scored one against them at last," he said, "but there is no time to tell you now, for here comes the train. Stand well back in the shadow. We must be guided by circumstances on the journey, but if by any chance I am separated from you, make the best of your way to Naples, and wait for the ship. Once out of Genoa, at the first opportunity you may safely resume your own character again. Ah, there comes Vizard from the buffet! He must be confident of your going south, for he is making straight for that first-class carriage without any attempt to watch the passengers. Come this way."

The train had clanked itself to a standstill, and the usual scramble for seats had begun. Vizard went to a carriage nearly opposite the refreshment room, and as I followed Kennard to a third-class compartment nearer the engine I saw that my enemy had already seated himself in a corner and had begun to read a paper as though not at all interested in surroundings. Kennard chose a compartment in which three Italians of the peasant class were travelling, and he paused on the step to say in a whisper that for the present I had better remain dumb.

We started without further incident, and my companion was soon chattering in their own tongue to the Italians, explaining, as I guessed from his gestures towards myself, and from the sympathetic glances thrown at me, the nature of my supposed infirmity. At Chiavari, an hour after starting, one of our fellow-travellers left the carriage, and thence onward as far as Spezia, which we reached at two o'clock in the morning, we were alone with an old woman and her son. As the train steamed into Spezia they, too, made preparations for departure, and I looked forward to being able to indulge in the relief of speech during the rest of the journey.

When the train had stopped and the Italians had got out, Kennard also rose.

"Keep your seat," he said. "There is a five minutes' wait here, and I want to try an experiment."

He disappeared among the crowd on the platform, and I sat in the far corner, hoping that at that early hour no strangers would get in. Four of the five minutes had passed when the sight of Vizard, strolling slowly along the line of carriages, caused me to shrink back and shade my face with my hand. But peeping between my fingers, I saw that he kept his eyes straight in front, and showed no sign of interest in the compartment as he went by. Half a minute later he repassed, going towards the carriage he had entered at Genoa, and a few seconds after Kennard rejoined me, jumping in just as the train was beginning to move.

"I wanted to test him, to see if he had penetrated my disguise, or could recognise me as the 'General Waldo' whom he saw on board when he was a stowaway steward," said the detective, pulling up the window and seating himself opposite. "He doesn't know me from Adam."

"He passed this carriage while you were gone," I said.

"Quite so, and it is very probable that he spotted you, if he did not at Genoa," replied Kennard. "But the great thing is that he doesn't know *me*. I am most anxious that he should not discover that you are accompanied by the sham chaplain who assisted your escape. He has probably been informed of that episode, and my identity must be puzzling him not a little."

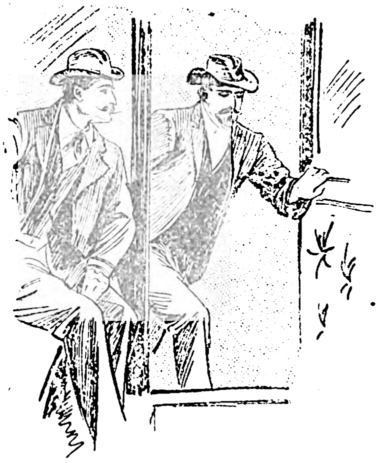
"When Zavertal got back to the ship and found 'General Waldo' missing, he would begin to suspect, would he not?" I said.

"He might if he knew what had since occurred on shore," replied Kennard, "but there has been no means of communication between the two as yet. It is even possible that Vizard, having heard of me from the Doctor, may guess whence the opposition to their schemes arises, but he has no personal knowledge of me, and I want to keep my character of 'Waldo' unsuspected by them, so that I may use it again if necessary.

"That he has not recognised me in my present get up as that same twaddling old fool is very certain, for I tried him pretty high. I put my head in at his carriage window and asked him if there was anything I could do for him—pretending to be a station tout, you know. Here is good evidence that he has not seen us in company, and that he does not remember me as a man he has seen before."

Kennard put into my hands a scrap of paper, on which were pencilled the words, "Nathan and Co., London," followed by a queer jumble of letters that conveyed nothing to me.

"It is a cypher telegram," explained Kennard. "He had no time to send it himself, and gave me a couple of *lire* to despatch it for him. He could hardly have furnished a higher proof of confidence in my being what I professed to be, and the incident is moreover useful as showing collusion between him and the owners of the *Queen of Night*. If we only had the key to that cypher, what a lot of trouble it would save us! But perhaps I may put my hand on it some day."



Jumping in as the train was just beginning to move.

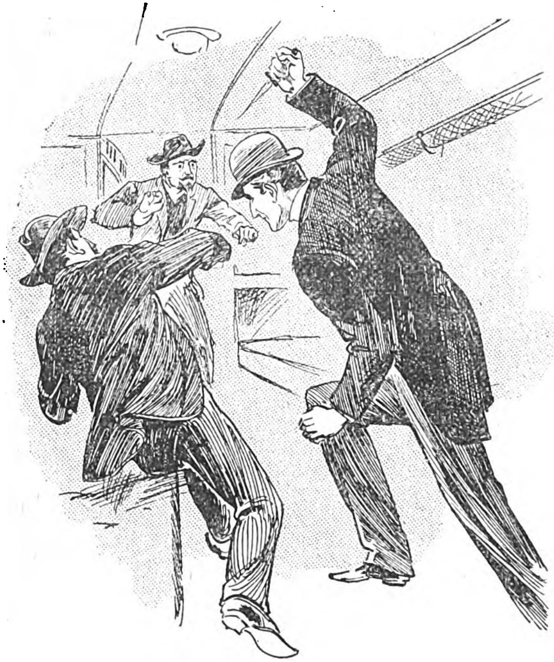
"At Genoa you said something about picking pockets," I said, wondering if ever a plain sailor had got pitchforked into such a strange tangle before.

"Yes," was the reply, "I thought that the end justified the means, and I took the liberty of relieving Mr. Vizard of a portion of the contents of his ticket pocket. I have told you already that I believe we have a gang of dangerous criminals to deal with, and I had cabled from Genoa to a friend in London for certain information that might help me. What I took from Vizard's pocket, however, confirms my view, without making it necessary for me to wait for my friend's reply. Unfortunately, my discovery only hints vaguely at the powerful combination arrayed against us without pointing directly to the nature or method of their designs. Still less is there any proof of crime committed or contemplated, that will enable us to call in the power of the law."

I saw that for some reason he was not desirous of imparting to me exactly what it was that he had gathered from the cards which I had seen him examining, and I forebore to question him on the subject. I know now that the cause of his reticence on the nature of his discovery lay in the fear that it might be a source of danger to me, and yet strangely enough he was shortly to be the means, on the spur of the moment, of exposing me to that very danger.

I could not resist, however, asking to be allowed to share the theory he had evidently formed as to the plots in which Zavertal and Vizard were engaged. I had understood, of course, that he apprehended danger to the lives of some of the passengers on the *Queen of Night*, Aline being among the number, but the why and the wherefore were what I was totally unable to fathom.

He thought a little before answering, and then said: "Well, it is fair that you should know, for I think that we shall either break up the combination once for all or both lose our lives in the attempt. My belief is that the ship you recently commanded is nothing more nor less than a floating murder-trap, in which Zavertal is engaged by the owners, they themselves receiving enormous fees from interested parties, to poison certain of the passengers every voyage. It is a syndicate of professional criminals working regularly for a gigantic stake. If I am right they must net say forty or fifty thousand pounds a voyage over and above their legitimate profits on the professed pleasure-cruise, and they no doubt are large."



Kennard opened the other door and sprang into the compartment.

"But how could such a systematic business be carried on—how could wretches wishing to use such an institution know of its existence?" I cried, aghast at the magnitude his suggestion.

"By means of perfect organisation, and through the details only being known to the principals who carry them out," was the reply. "For instance, you yourself have in a way been made an agent in the affair by being intrusted with the technical command of the ship, yet you were ignorant of her real mission. I think it probable that Nathan, Vizard, and Zavertal are the sole partners in the scheme and are the actual owners of the vessel, Vizard's share of the work being, as a rule, to mix in society and make the first insidious advances to likely clients with superfluous relatives. Vizard, we know, keeps his connection with the ship a strict secret, so that possibly the amateur criminals he procures are handed over to Nathan for the final bargain to be struck."

I shuddered as I thought of Nathan's unaccountable call at Sir Simon Crawshay's house on the day I was there, and of the cheque-book which the baronet was putting away when I entered his study. Kennard looked very grave when I mentioned what I had seen.

"All points the same way," he said, and relapsed into silence, from which I failed to tempt him till the train began to slacken speed for the quarter of an hour's stop at Pisa. Then he expressed his intention of again minimising the risk of Vizard associating the two of us by leaving the carriage while we were in the station. "Keep my seat for me in case anyone gets in—though that is not likely," he added, slipping from the footboard directly we reached the platform.

Pisa being the junction for the port and favourite watering-place of Leghorn, there was plenty of bustle in the station, though most of the passengers being English and American tourists travelling first-class, there seemed every chance of our retaining our privacy. There was the usual scramble for the refreshment-room, the door of which was within view of where I sat, but neither among the crowds jostling into it, or passing the carriage, as at Spezia, did I catch a glimpse of Vizard. The time went slowly, and I was glad when the bell rang at last and the people hurried back to their seats.

Sitting in the corner furthest from the platform, I watched eagerly for Kennard's return, wondering if he would bring any news. Suddenly, just as I caught sight of him approaching the carriage, the sound of breathing within a few inches of my face caused me to look round at the open window next which I was sitting. There, close to me, and within touch of my hand, stood Vizard on the footboard, his handsome features ablaze with triumphant malice. I had barely time to see the gleam of steel in his clenched fist, when Kennard opened the other door and sprang into the compartment, the train beginning to move at the same moment. He took in the situation at a glance, and his eyes snapped fire.

"*The Black Arrow pierces the Red Heart no more,*" he cried, and, dashing past me, sprang out, two seconds after Vizard with a bitter curse had disappeared in the darkness.

In another minute the train had gathered speed, and I was alone in the carriage—bereft of friend and foe.

(To be continued.)

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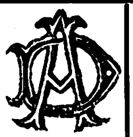

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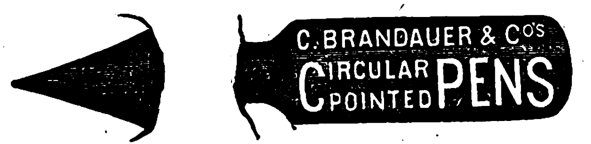

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BLACKHEADS. I guarantee to cure the most stubborn cases when all else has failed. Book of particulars for an inexpensive, harmless, permanent, and certain home cure, post free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Mrs. V. EVANS, 18, Union Passage, Birmingham.

HAIR DESTROYED.

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BLUSHING.

A lady, whose daughter was cured of this in less than a month, will be happy to send particulars to anyone inclosing stamped addressed envelope to Mrs. WILLIAMS, No. 1, County Chambers B., Martineau St., Birmingham.

MODERN MOTTOES.

Maxims of Celebrated Men, whose names, for obvious reasons, cannot be given here.

An aged SPORTSMAN informs us that through life he has carried out this wise maxim—"BEECHAM first and pleasure after."

A learned PROFESSOR writes—"A BEECHAM'S PILL in the stomach is worth two in the box."

A practical J.P. recently announced publicly from the Bench—"BEECHAM'S honest PILLS are the best policy."

A successful BUSINESS MAN wires as follows—"BEECHAM'S PILLS are wonderful for making you pay up and look pleasant."

A great ECONOMIST says his favourite proverb is—"Put by BEECHAM'S PILLS for an ailing day."

A well-known CLERIC in a recent address remarked—"BEECHAM'S PILLS are never too late to mend you."

A true LOVER telegraphs us on his wedding day—"BEECHAM'S PILLS not being faint-hearted have won many a lady."

An aspiring MERCHANT lately let out the secret that "BEECHAM'S PILLS never say fail."

A famous BREWER has just let the cat out of the bag as follows—"I have always found BEECHAM'S PILLS to be XXXX."

A well-known OCTOGENARIAN says—"Note this: Never put off till to-morrow the BEECHAM'S PILLS you should take to-day."

A celebrated ORATOR in a great speech recently said—"BEECHAM'S PILLS live and let live."

A plodding TRADESMAN is telling his customers his motto has ever been—"BEECHAM'S PILLS try, try, try again."

A well-known EVANGELIST was recently heard to remark to a friend—"BEECHAM'S PILLS to thine own self are true."

A learned JUDGE, sounding the virtues of BEECHAM'S PILLS, said—"Far better fly to the PILLS you know than to those ye know naught of."

A recent INVALID, now convalescent, says he found BEECHAM'S PILLS "A friend in need—A friend indeed."

A noted PUGILIST, at present abroad, cables—"My motto has always been ONE PILL down, another come on."

A large EMPLOYER of labour writes emphasising the fact that "BEECHAM'S PILLS are slow to promise, quick to perform."

A SCHOOL PRINCIPAL is instilling into his students that "BEECHAM'S PILLS do as you would be done by."

A prominent GOLDSMITH, being asked for his appraisement of BEECHAM'S PILLS, reports—"For practical purposes they are exactly worth their weight in gold."

A venerable PHILANTHROPIST writes—"Through life my motto has been, Let Charity always begin at home with BEECHAM'S PILLS."

Finally, INNUMERABLE COMMUNICATIONS are to hand as follows—"Take care of Number One by a judicious use of

BEECHAM'S PILLS.

THIRTY-TWO PAGES. ONE PENNY.

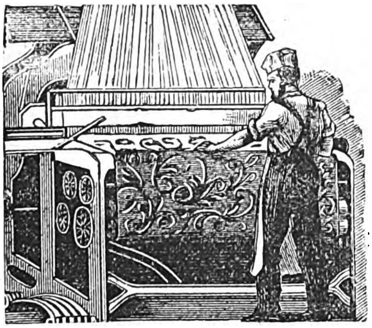
SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 358. FOR WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 9TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

BE SURE TO CUT

10,000 RUGS GIVEN AWAY.



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With every Carpet we shall ABSOLUTELY GIVE AWAY a very handsome Rug to match, or we will send two CARPETS and Two RUGS for 10s. 6d.

MONEY WILLINGLY RETURNED IF NOT APPROVED.

The *Queen* says: "Decidedly stouter and handsomer than any of the kind, the price being the astounding part of the matter." *Schoolmistress*: "For style, durability, and cheapness they cannot be beaten." *Penny Illustrated Paper*: "Manufactured in every variety of colour, and is one of the most surprising bargains I have seen." *Church Bells*: "Truly wonderful value."

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"West Brighton.

"DEAR SIR,—I beg to thank you for your prompt attention to my wire of Friday. The Carpet came duly to hand on Saturday, and I am exceedingly pleased with it, so much so that I purpose calling at your warehouse one day this week, when I expect to be in town, to see if I can supply myself with two more to suit my present requirements.—Yours faithfully, W. HEATH HAYWOOD."

"45, George Street, Plymouth.

"GENTLEMEN,—The Carpet is duly to hand, and gives entire satisfaction.—Yours truly, J. C. PICKFORD."

"Mullaghmore.

"I beg to acknowledge receipt of Carpets, with which I am very pleased; they are splendid value for the money, and far superior to what I expected. Later on I shall be pleased to favour you with further orders.—Yours sincerely, H. CUNNINGHAM."

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Mason's EXTRACT of HERBS

Can be obtained for 6d., plus a pound or two of Sugar and a little Yeast.

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HYSON GREEN WORKS,
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(REALLY GENUINE.)

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"WORTH A GUINEA A BOX."

BEECHAM'S PILLS

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BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,

SUCH AS

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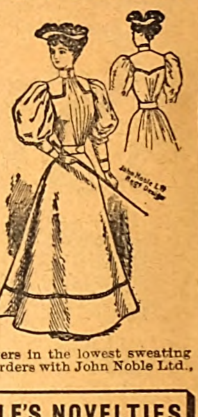

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BLACKHEADS. I guarantee to cure the most stubborn cases when all else has failed. Book of particulars for an inexpensive, harmless, permanent, and certain home cure, post free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Mrs. V. EVANS, 18, Union Passage, Birmingham.

DEAFNESS, HEAD NOISES, etc., ABSOLUTELY CURED in 24 hours, by using one bottle of "Auraline Essence," the Great Indian Discovery. Millions of sufferers cured after all else had failed. Many testimonials. Why remain deaf when a cure awaits you? Send 2/9 to the MACKAY REMEDY CO., 104, High Holborn, London.

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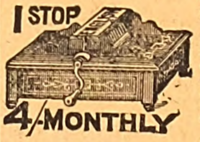

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£20 See Illus. Guide and Catalogue (259 pages), 3d. "How to Open a Cigar Stores, £20 to £2,000." TOBACCONISTS' OUTFITTING CO., 186, Euston Road, London. (Over 50 years' reputation.) Manager, H. MYERS.

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EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON OF PEARSONS WEEKLY

SHORT STORIES

No. 358.] For the Week ending November 9th, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

FOR THE HONOUR OF FRANCE.

"PARDON! Madame does not know that this is a smoking carriage?"

"But yes. Monsieur is very good. It is that my husband would smoke. He is an old soldier. He smokes all the time. *Ciel!* they are like chimneys, these old soldiers. This man of mine regrets that he cannot smoke when he is asleep!"

While madame delivered this address she continued also to mount the steps, and as she finished it she seated herself in the corner of the carriage opposite to me. She was short and round, and sixty years old, and smiling like the sun on a fine day.

In a moment her husband followed her, bowing to me as he entered the carriage. Seating himself beside her, and giving her plump hand a little affectionate pat, he said: "It is all right, little one. Marie will receive her jelly in good condition. I myself saw that the basket was placed right side up in the carriage. The jelly will not spill." Then turning to me he added: "My wife makes a wonderful jelly of apricots, monsieur. We are taking some of it to our married daughter, who lives in Avignon."

He was a well-set-up old boy, with a face most pleasantly frank, close-cut grey hair, short grey whiskers, and a bristling white moustache. Across his forehead, cutting through his right eyebrow, was a desperate scar, that I at once associated in my mind with the red ribbon of the legion that he wore in the buttonhole of his black frock coat. He looked the officer in retreat, and the very gentleness and sweetness of his manner made me sure that he had done some gallant fighting in his time.

As the train pulled out from the station—it was at Tarascon that they had joined me—he drew forth from his pocket a black little wooden pipe and a tobacco pouch. This was my opportunity. I also drew forth a pipe and a tobacco pouch. "Would monsieur accept some of my tobacco?" I asked. It was tobacco of the Havana.

Monsieur would be pleased to do so.

Then he struck a wax match, and paused to light his pipe. He drew a dozen whiffs in silence, while on his face was the thoughtful look of one whose taste in tobacco was critical, and whose love for it was strong.

"Thunder of guns, but it is good!" he exclaimed, as he took the pipe from his mouth, and passed it lightly back and forth beneath his nose. "Had we smoked tobacco like this in the Crimea we should have whipped those rascally Russians in a single week! Ah, that we often were without tobacco was the hardest part of all. I have smoked coffee grounds and hay, monsieur, and have been thankful to get them—I myself, who well know what is good and what is not good in a pipe! This tobacco—it is divine!"

"Monsieur served in the Crimea?"

"This is a proof of it," he said, a little grimly, touching the scar on his forehead.

"And this," his wife added, touching the bit of red ribbon in his buttonhole. "He was the bravest man in all that war, monsieur, this old husband of mine. His cross was given him by——"

"Tchut, little one! What does monsieur care how I won my cross? It was not much that I did. Any man would have done the same."

"But the others did *not* do the same. They ran away, and left him to do it alone. Did not his majesty tell you——"

"Ah, monsieur hears what a *babillarde* she is. If she were given her own way, she would swear that I commanded the allied armies, and that I blew up the Redan, and stormed the Malakoff, and captured Sebastopol all alone!"

"Tell monsieur what it was you did," said the little woman warmly. "Tell him truly and precisely what it was

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you did, and then let him judge for himself if what I have said be one bit less than your due."

"And so bring monsieur to know that I am a babbling old woman like thyself?"

He pinched her gently, and then settled himself back against the cushion as though with the intention of giving himself wholly to the enjoyment of his pipe; yet there was a look in his eyes that showed how strong was the desire within him—the desire that is natural to every brave and simple-minded old soldier—to tell the story of his honourable scars. Even had I felt no desire to hear this story, not to have pressed him to tell it would have been cruel. But little pressing was required.

"Since monsieur is good enough to desire to hear what little there is to tell," he said, "and to show him how foolish is this old woman of mine, I will tell him the whole affair. It is a stupid nothing; but monsieur may be amused by the trick that was put upon me by those great generals—yes, that certainly was droll.

"Our regiment was the Twenty-seventh of the Line, and was drawn almost wholly from the towns and villages in these parts. We all were *Provençeaux* together, and the men of the other regiments of our division gave us the name of the Provence cats—though why they gave us that foolish name I am sure they never knew any more than we did ourselves. It was not because we were cowards, that I will swear; our regiment did some very pretty fighting in its time, as anyone may know by reading the reports which were published in the gazettes of those days.

"Our division held Mont Sapoune—the French right, you know—facing the little Redan across the Carenage Ravine. It was early in the siege, and we had only drawn our first parallel, and partly covering the ground where we dug our rifle-pits later on. But we were going ahead with our work fast, and already we had thrown up the little redoubts known as No. 11 and No. 15, that covered the advancing earthwork leading to where our second parallel was to begin. Redoubt No. 11 was a good hundred yards, and redoubt No. 15 was more than three times that distance outside of our lines; and everybody knew that these two advanced posts would be in great danger until our second parallel was well under way.

"So very possible was it that they might be surprised, and the guns turned on our own lines in support of a general attack, that in each of them spikes and hammers were kept in readiness against the need for spiking the guns before they fell into the enemy's hands. Our regiment lay just behind these redoubts, in the rear of the artillerymen who manned our trenches; and as the gunners had plenty to do all day long, and through the night too sometimes, the work of keeping up the night pickets fell to our share.

"It was while things were this way that I was on picket early one morning on our extreme left, close over the edge of the Carenage Ravine. I had come on with the midnight relief, and by five o'clock in the morning, when day was just breaking, my teeth were chattering and I was stiff with cold. Name of a name, but it was cold those winter mornings! We have nothing like it, even when the worst mistral is blowing, in our winters here in Provence.

"It was while the light was still faint that I thought I heard, coming up through the mist, a little rattling sound, such as might be made by a man stumbling and dropping his musket among the broken rocks. Just then the mist was too thick for me to see twenty feet below me. I was sure that something bad was going on down there, but I did not want to make a fool of myself by giving a false alarm. All that I could do was to cock my musket and to hold it pointed towards where the sound seemed to come from, all ready—should there be need for it—to give the alarm and get in a shot at the enemy at the same time.

"Truly, monsieur, it seemed to me that I stood like that while my heart went pounding against my ribs, for a whole year. I was no longer cold; the blood was racing through my veins, and I was everywhere in a glow. Suddenly there came a puff of wind, and as the mist thinned for a moment I saw that the whole ravine was full of Russians. Their advance already was half-way up the bank nearest to our works. In less than ten minutes the whole of them would be dashing into our outlying redoubts. As I pulled the trigger of my musket I tried to shout, but my throat was as dry as a furnace, and I could only gasp. And will you believe it? my musket missed fire! Name of a name, what a state I was in! There was the enemy coming on under cover of the mist; and there was I, the only man who could save our army, standing dumb like a useless fool!

"What I must do came to me like a flash. If I ran inside of our lines to give the alarm, the chances were a thousand to one that the enemy would have the outlying redoubt, very likely would have them both, and would turn the guns before help could come. But I knew—at least I hoped—that there was time for me to get to the more exposed redoubt ahead of them and give the word to spike the guns. It was all in an instant, I say, that I found this thought in my mind, and my musket and cartridge-box thrown I don't know where, and myself dashing off through the mist across the broken ground like a deer.

"As I rushed into the redoubt, our men thought that I was the Russians; and when they knew me by my uniform for a Frenchman, and heard me crying in a hoarse whisper: 'Spike the guns!' they thought that I was mad. But the lieutenant in command of the battery had at least a little sense, even if he did not have much courage, and he looked towards where I pointed, and then he saw the shakos, as the mist lifted again, not a hundred feet away.

"'Save yourselves, I will make the guns safe,' he cried to his men—he was not all a coward, poor fellow—and as they ran for it he picked up the spikes and the hammer. Tap, tap, tap! one gun was spiked. Tap, tap, tap! another. Then we heard the Russians beginning to scramble up outside.

"'It can't be done. Run, cat!' he cried, and away he started after his men. The name that I called him as he ran away, monsieur, was a very foul name. God forgive me for what I said! But I was determined that it *should* be done. In a second I had picked up the nails and the hammer, and—tap, tap, tap!—the third gun was safe. 'Run, cat!' I heard the lieutenant call again. But—tap!—I had the nail started in the last gun, and then, right above me, was a Russian major and with him a dozen of his men. Tap! and I had the nail half-way home as the major jumped down beside me, with his sword raised. I knew that I could parry his blow with the hammer and then possibly get away; but I wanted to make sure that the gun could not be turned. And so—it was quick thinking that I did just then, monsieur—tap! and the gun was no better than old iron. At the same instant it seemed to me that the whole world burst into a tremendous roar and ten thousand blazing stars—but it was only the sword of that confounded Russian major banging against my skull!"

The little woman was almost sobbing. She took her husband's hand in both of hers.

"But you see that I was *not* killed, little one," he said; and he raised her hands in his and kissed them.

"It was not until the next day, monsieur," he went on, "that I knew anything. Then I was in the hospital."

"'How did it go?' I asked of the hospital steward.

"'The Russians were driven back,' he said, 'and a lot of them were captured. You owe it to the same Russian major who almost killed you that your life was saved. As soon as he was brought into camp, he sent a message to the general begging that you might be looked after quickly. If there was any life left in you, it was worth saving, he said, for you were a brave man—and he told how you had spiked those last two guns. By Jove! but for that message you would have died. When they brought you in here you were nearly gone.'

"'And the lieutenant who ran away?' I asked.

"'Oh, he was killed—as he deserved. Now you know all about it. Hold your tongue.'

"I felt so foolishly weak, and there was such a pain in my head as I began to remember it all at once, that I could not ask any more questions. Presently my head began to buzz, and the pain in it grew worse, and then for a week I had a fever that came near to taking me off. But I pulled through"—he squeezed his wife's hand that again had been laid in his—"and in three weeks I was back with the regiment. It was all due to my having such a wonderfully thick skull, the doctors said, the major's sword had not broken it past all mending. When I came into the camp the boys all cheered me, and I was as proud as a cock. And then, the first thing I knew, up came a corporal and a file of men and arrested me.

"'What am I arrested for?' I asked.

"'For being absent without leave from your regiment during battle,' said the corporal, and marched me off to the guard-house. Then I was not proud at all. But I was very angry. That I should be arrested in this fashion did not seem to me fair.

"In half an hour back came the corporal and his file of men. This time they took me to headquarters. In we went, and the corporal stood beside me, and his men behind me in a row. It seemed as though half the officers of our army were there—my colonel, the general of our brigade, the general of our division, half-a-dozen other generals, three or four English officers in their smart red coats. Presently there was a stir, and in came the Emperor! Whatever it all meant I could not tell at all!

"'Private Labonne,' said my colonel—he spoke in a very harsh tone, yet it seemed to me that there was an odd sort of twinkle in his eye—'you deserted your post, you were absent without leave when your regiment went into action.'

"'Yes, but——'

"'Not a word of excuse, Private Labonne. You know the penalty.'

"I did know the penalty, of course. It was to be taken out and shot. I began to think that this was worse than the Russians!

"'When shall I order the court martial, your majesty?' asked my colonel.

"'I will be the court martial,' said the Emperor. 'This is a serious matter—this is a matter to be dealt with in a hurry. The case is proved. There is no need for a trial. I order Private Labonne to be shot at once.'

"I shivered all down my back. It *was* worse than the Russians—very much worse.

"'Take him away,' said my colonel.

"The corporal put his hand on my shoulder, and the guard closed in. 'March!' said the corporal.

"'Halt!' said the Emperor. 'Private Labonne, before you are taken away and shot, tell me what you were doing in that battery.'

"'Nothing, your majesty.'

"'Nothing? I thought that I heard something about guns being spiked. Did you not spike a gun, Private Labonne?'

"'Yes, your majesty.'

"'Did you not spike two guns—and both of them after the gunners and the officer in command of the battery had run away?'

"'Yes, your majesty.'

"'And why did you not run away, too, Private Labonne?'

"'Because I wanted to spike the guns, your majesty.'

"'You did not think, then, that it was your duty as one of my soldiers to save your life by running with the others?'

"This question puzzled me, for I certainly never had thought of the matter in that way at all. It occurred to me that perhaps I had not done my duty. But what the Emperor said, for all that he was the Emperor, did not seem reasonable, and I made bold to answer him:

"'If I had taken care of my own life, your majesty, a great many of your soldiers would have died to pay for it. It would have been a bad day's work if those two guns had not been spiked, for the Russians certainly would have turned them on our lines.'

"The Emperor turned to my colonel. 'There is something in what Private Labonne says, eh, colonel? I suppose there really would have been the very mischief to pay had the enemy turned those guns?'

"'I suppose there would,' said my colonel, a little grimly.

"'Then the case is not quite so black against Private Labonne as it at first appeared?'

"'Not quite so black,' said my colonel.

"'Perhaps we need not have him shot, after all?'

"'Perhaps not—not this time, at least.'

"'We might compliment him a little upon his bravery. For it was rather brave—eh, colonel?—to stay in that battery and spike those guns, while a hundred Russians were tumbling in upon him, and his own comrades had run off and left him to do his duty and to die for it there alone?'

"My colonel's voice broke a little as he answered: 'It was very brave, your majesty.'

"'Eh, well, Private Labonne,' said the Emperor, turning again to me, 'we won't shoot you. Your colonel is right about your bravery; and to shoot a brave man, except in battle, is a mistake. The Russian officer who came so near killing you was a major, I am told; well, you may happen to meet him again, and if you do, it is only fair that your rank should equal his. Here is your commission, Major Labonne; and here is a little thing'—it was his own cross of the Legion that the Emperor gave me—'that I want you to wear in remembrance of that day when you did as brave a piece of work as ever was done by a French soldier for the honour of France!'

"And so you see, monsieur, it was only a comedy about my being shot, after all. Here is Avignon. You must wait for me a moment, little one, while I get the basket of jelly for Marie."

Thomas Janvier.

GOLDEN STAR

. . A ROMANCE . .

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

On the eve of the fall of the Inca empire Vilcaroya marries Golden Star, and with her drinks a potion, the result of which is a death-like trance, in hope of fulfilling the prophecy that the empire shall be restored by one who has come alive from the grave. Three hundred and sixty years later Professor Lamson brings, as he thinks, Vilcaroya's mummy from Peru to England. His friend Djama believes that he can restore it to life, and does so. Six months later the party return to Peru, Ruth, Djama's sister, going with them. At Panama they meet Hartness, a friend of Lamson's, who joins in the expedition. Arrived in Cuzco, Vilcaroya put himself into communication with the remnant of his people, and prepares to begin his work. He summons one Tupac-Rayca to meet him with twenty others of the old Inca blood on the Rodadero, a plain behind the great fortress. The same night at dinner he accidentally reveals the fact that Golden Star was his sister as well as his wife. It is explained to him that such a union as this is impossible in the modern world. Later on the same night he entices Djama on to the Rodadero and bids his men blindfold him. He then leads them by a way of which he only knows the secret into the Hall of Gold, a subterranean chamber in which some of the treasures of the Incas are hidden, where he dresses himself in the imperial robes, and then, seated on a throne, he receives the oath of allegiance from Tupac and his comrades. He shows Djama the treasures, and promises to load him with them if he will restore Golden Star to life, and threatens him with death if he reveals what he has seen. After this he has some of the gold taken to their lodgings, and with part of this buys a convenient hacienda in the country, and in due course they set out for the resting-place of Golden Star. Her body is found and brought back to the hacienda, and there, when his work is almost finished, Djama refuses to complete it unless Vilcaroya will swear to give Golden Star to him. He refuses, but afterwards consents on condition that Djama will give Ruth to him. He laughs him to scorn, and Vilcaroya draws his dagger and swears that he will drive it into Golden Star's heart unless Djama consents. Djama yields, and Vilcaroya obliges him to go and bring Ruth, the Professor, and Hartness to Golden Star's bedside.

CHAPTER XVII.

A Woman's Way.

"There is your royal would-be lover, Ruth! Come, if you don't believe me, you can hear from his own lips that upon you, and you alone, depends Golden Star's return to life. Is not that so, your Highness?"

It was Djama who said this, and as he said it, he caught Joyful Star by the hand, and half led, half dragged her towards me from between the other two. But before he had come half the length of the room, Francis Hartness had overtaken him in a few swift strides. I saw his hand fall heavily on his shoulder, and with his other hand he took Ruth's out of his. His blue eyes were nearly black with anger, and his bronzed face was grey and set and pale with the passion that his strong will was holding back, and his voice was low and clear, and vibrating like the sound of a distant bell when he spoke and said:

"I can't stand that, Djama. Are you forgetting that your sister is a woman, and that you have brought her into the presence of the dead?"

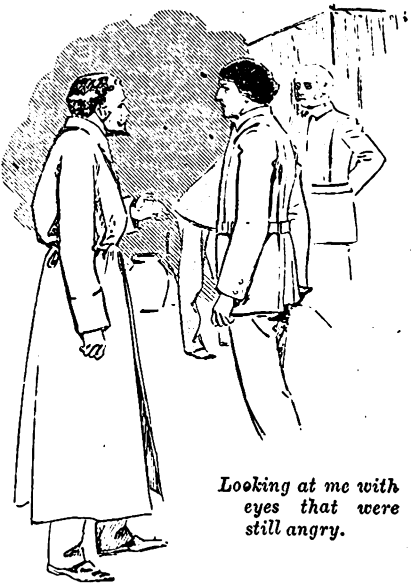
"You are mad, Laurens," said Joyful Star, before her brother could reply. "Surely, this dreadful work of yours has turned your brain. Vilcaroya, what does all this mean? Is Golden Star dead or alive? Ah, how beautiful she is now! No, surely she cannot be dead!"

She had broken away from both her brother and Francis Hartness, and as she said the last words she was leaning over Golden Star's pillow, softly stroking her hair; and then she stooped lower and kissed her forehead. Then the others came up to the bedside, Francis Hartness and Djama in front, and the Professor standing silent and wondering behind them.

"If Djama won't speak, will you, Vilcaroya?" said Hartness, looking at me with eyes that were still angry. "What is that dagger in your hand for, and what is the meaning of this story that he has been telling me?"

"The meaning is of life or death," I said. "Laurens Djama will not give Golden Star's life back to her if I will not swear to give her to him when she lives again, and I have sworn that he shall not restore her to life unless he swears to give Joyful Star to me, for I love her, and will have neither life nor empire without her."

As I listened to my own voice saying these bold words it seemed to me as though another were speaking, for even in that hot moment of passion and desperate resolve I could scarce believe them mine. For the instant I thought Hartness would have struck me down where I stood, nor could I have used my dagger against him, for he was a man and I loved him, though I saw

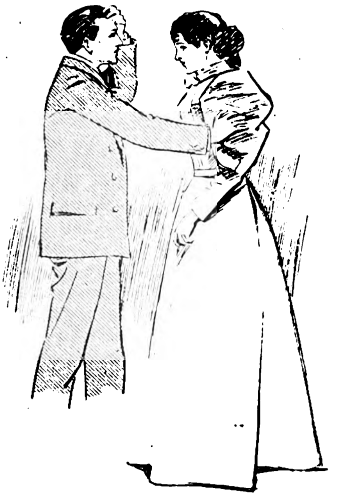


Looking at me with eyes that were still angry.

now that we both loved the same woman. But before either of us could move, Ruth had risen erect and come between us, her cheeks burning with shame and her eyes aglow with anger.

"What!" she said, "Laurens give me to you, Vilcaroya! Don't you know yet that an English girl can only give herself, and then only to the man she chooses of her own free will? Do you think I am a slave or a human chattel to be bartered away like that? Nonsense; and you, Captain Hartness, don't look so fiercely at Vilcaroya. Remember that he is your friend and mine, or has been, and has not the same ideas as we have. If he had——"

"He has," I said, breaking in upon her speech, "since Joyful Star has spoken. He is not her lover but her slave, and she has shamed him. I will eat the words that should never have been spoken. Let Golden Star live! I will keep my oath and ask nothing whatever in return."



"Mad! Yes, I think I must have been."

So the savage within me was tamed, and I, who but a few minutes before had been ready to take two lives at the prompting of a single word, dropped my dagger and stood with bowed head, humble as a chidden child before her whose lightest word was then my most sacred law. I raised my eyes and looked at her to see if my words had pleased her. As our eyes met she gave me a glance that I would have died to win from her, and then, pushing me and Francis Hartness gently aside, yet with a force that neither of us could have resisted, she took her brother by the arm and, leading him to the bedside with one hand, she laid the other on Golden Star's brow, and said:

"Laurens, can you really bring her back to life?"

"Yes," he answered, and I could see that he did not dare to raise his eyes to hers, "but——"

"But you will only do it for a price, you think. For shame! Is that the way you use this terrible power that you possess? Is my brother so mean a creature as that? You love her, you say, even as she lies there neither dead nor alive? Well, when she lives, she will be worthy of any man's love, but only of a man's, Laurens, and you would not be a man, with all your learning and power, if you insisted on so mean an advantage as your skill gives you. You must be mad, or worse than mad, to be able to look on such beauty as that, knowing that you can restore it to life, and yet ask a price before you will do it. Come, Laurens, that is not like your old self. Use your power with the same generosity that it has been given to you, and then win Golden Star like a man if you can."

Where my strength had been vanquished her sweet wisdom conquered. The man who had laughed at my threats, and told me without a quiver in his voice how he could, and would, slay himself rather than I should do what he knew I could do, stood humbled and abashed before the righteous and yet gently spoken reproach of her who was pleading for the life of a sister woman.

I saw Djama's hands meet behind his back, and his fingers begin to twine about each other. I saw him look from Ruth to Golden Star, from the living woman who was his sister to her lifeless counterpart. Then came over him one of those swift changes of mood which we had so often seen before. All the cold cruelty of his long chained-up passion vanished. His face, from being stone, became flesh again. The fierce glitter, as of a sword's point, died out of his eyes, and they grew warm and soft again, and his voice was almost as sweet and gentle as Ruth's, and strangely like it, too, as he answered her and said:

"You are right, Ruth. I was not myself. I was a brute unworthy either of love or power. Let her die! Good God I would die myself a thousand times rather than do that! Mad! Yes, I think I must have been even to think of such a crime for a moment, but if you were a man and had lived through what I have lived through for the last two days and nights you would understand me and forgive me. Yes, she shall live. How could I ever have thought of letting her die!"

Then he rose from his half-stooping posture over the bed and came to where I stood at the foot, with his hand outstretched and a smile on his lips, and said:

"You have heard what I have just said, Vilcaroya. You have withdrawn your conditions; now I will take back mine. It is no use for you and me to be enemies. We have had our fight and I confess myself beaten. Now let us try to be friends for Ruth's sake and Golden Star's, and by morning I promise you that you shall be telling her the story of your resurrection and her own."

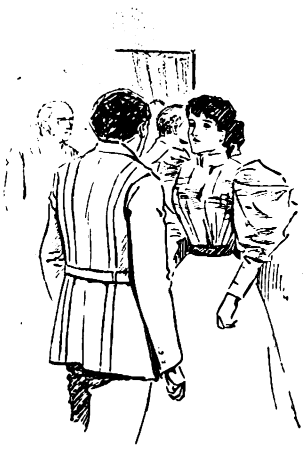
For a moment I stared at him in speechless wonder, striving to understand how it could be that those eyes which had, but so short a time before, been glaring hate at me, could now be looking so kindly and frankly into mine, and how those lips which had just been sneering so coldly and cruelly alike at my love and my hate, could shape such friendly and honest-sounding words. Then I looked at Ruth, asking her with my eyes what she would have me do, and in instant obedience to what I saw took Djama's hand in mine and said:

"So be it. The evil in our hearts has spoken, now let the good that is there speak and let us be friends, and when Golden Star awakes with my lips she shall bless you and her who has made peace between us where there was strife."

"Miss Ruth, you must allow me to congratulate you on your success as a peacemaker," said the Professor, speaking now for the first time since he had come into the room, and coming forward to where Joyful Star still stood by the bedside. "It would have been ten thousand pities if this—ah—this little affair had ended any other way, for all of the exquisitely perfect subjects——"

"Subjects, Professor?" said Ruth, interrupting him with a laugh. "Do you venture to call Golden Star a *subject*, just as you do those awful things in your dissecting rooms? Look at her—a subject indeed! Don't call her that again in my hearing, please!"

"Oh, ah, of course, I beg your pardon a thousand times, and her Highness's too. Really, I spoke quite thoughtlessly and most improperly," he answered, laughing at her mock displeasure. "And now, Djama, since we have had two declarations of love and a peacemaking, don't you think it would be cruel to keep her Highness waiting any longer on the threshold of her new life? Come, Hartness, you and I have no more business here at present. Don't you think we had better go and wait somewhere else for the working of the miracle?"



Then she turned to me.

"Just what I was going to say," replied Hartness, who had gone away a little distance from the bed while we were talking, and had been standing by the table, seeming to examine the strange instruments that were scattered about it. "Of course, the Doctor will wish to finish his work alone."

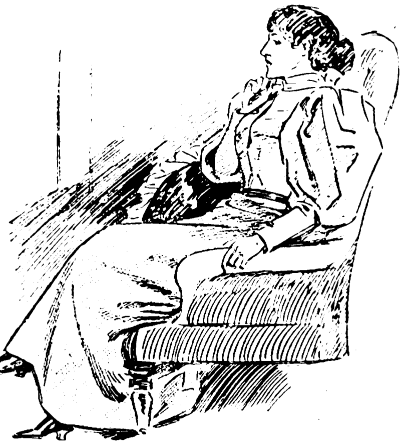
"May not Vilcaroya and I stay, Laurens?" asked Joyful Star, looking at him with appealing eyes. "You know, it will be much better for her to see another woman by her when she wakes, and then she will recognise Vilcaroya, and that will tell her that she is among friends."

But Djama shook his head and said:

"No, Ruth, not yet. There is something else to be done before that, and I must do it alone. You forget it is not merely a matter of waking. She is not alive yet, but if you will leave me alone for about half an hour I promise you that I will call you and Vilcaroya back before she actually wakes."

"Very well," she said, moving away from the bedside. "I don't want to pry into your mysteries." Then she turned to me, and said, with a faint smile on her lips: "Vilcaroya, come into the dining-room; I have something to say to you."

She went down the room after the Professor and Francis Hartness, and I followed her with beating heart and anxious thoughts, wondering what new lesson it was she was about to teach me.



Resting her cheek upon her hand.

Djama closed and locked the door after us. She led the way to the dining-room, where there was a light burning. It was empty, for the others, hearing what she had said to me, had gone out into the court-yard. Then she turned and faced me with her back to the light; but in spite of that I could see that her eyes were bright, and her fair face flushed as she said to me in a low voice that trembled a little:

"Vilcaroya, I am going to forget everything that was said in the room yonder, and—and you must forget it, too. It was no time or place for such things to be said, and you and Laurens were not yourselves when you said them. If you do not forget them we cannot be friends any more. You understand me, don't you?"

Gentle and sweetly spoken as the words were, they fell upon my heart like snow upon a fainting flame, yet I felt that, like all her words, they were true and just. I crossed my hands on my breast with one of my old-world gestures, and standing so before her with bowed head, I said:

"The will of Joyful Star is my law. Let what I spoke in my madness be forgotten as you have said. Who am I that I should say such things?—a poor savage that has wandered from his own world into hers where he is a stranger."

"No, not a savage, Vilcaroya. You must never say that word again. How could Golden Star's brother be a savage? How could I—but there, we have said enough for the present. We have other things to think of now."

With that she turned away and sat down in a long low chair, resting her cheek upon her hand, and looking out of one of the windows at the stars, while I went and stood before another to look at the same stars that she was looking at, and so we waited in silence until the door opened, and we heard Djama's voice telling us that the long expected moment of Golden Star's awakening had come at last.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A New Life and a New Hope.

As Joyful Star went to the door I stood aside and waited for her to pass me and go out first. As she went by our eyes met for a moment, and I saw that hers were bright with tears. My heart leapt at the sight, and then fell still again and well-nigh fainting. What had she said to me but a few moments before? How dare I dream that those sweet tears could be for me?

I followed her and Djama into the room, but half-way between the door and the bed I stopped, not daring to go on, held back by some impulse I could not name. I saw her lean over the pillow for a moment of silence that for me was breathless. Then came a soft, sweet sound, and then a little cry—was it hers or Golden Star's? Djama beckoned to me. I went with swift, silent steps to the foot of the little bed, and saw Golden Star's blue eyes looking wonderingly up into Ruth's face, and her red lips smiling at her. The miracle had been completed. She had awakened her with a kiss.

"Come and give her your welcome back to life, Vilcaroya," she whispered, rising and turning her fair face with its wet cheeks and smiling lips towards me. I went and stood over the pillow, and laid my trembling lips on Golden Star's brow, and then I said, in the words that had been the first of my own new life:

"*Cori-Coyllur Ñustallipa, ñusta mi!*"

She looked at me, but there was no more recognition in her gaze than in that of a new-born child, nor was there any answering smile upon her lips. Unheeding this for the moment, I went on and said, still speaking very gently and softly in our own tongue:

"Thou art thrice welcome back from the shades of night into the bright presence of our Father the Sun, oh, Golden Star! Dost thou not remember me, Vilcaroya, thy brother, who went into the darkness with thee long ago, and has been permitted to return before thee that he might greet thee and bid thee welcome?"

Her eyes wandered from my face to Joyful Star's, and then she smiled again, but no answering words came from her parted lips. Now, as we looked from one another to her, a great fear came into all our hearts, and Ruth gave it voice.

"Laurens," she whispered, laying her hands upon his arm, "what is the matter? Vilcaroya spoke at once, didn't he? Why doesn't she speak? Oh, surely it can't be that she is—that she has come back to life without memory or—or her reason? What is it?"

I waited for Djama's answer as a man might wait for words that were to tell him whether he was to live or die. He put us both gently away from the bed, and then, laying his hand on Golden Star's brow, he looked long and steadfastly into her eyes. It seemed to me as though Ruth and I could hear each other's hearts beating and counting off the slow seconds until he raised his head again and said in the slow, even tones of the man of science who, for the time, had overcome and banished the lover:

"Memory, perhaps, even probably; but reason, no. These are not the eyes of an imbecile or an idiot, but they are the eyes of a child. It is possible that when she fully recovers we may find her mind a perfect blank—a virgin page on which the story of her new life will have to be written."

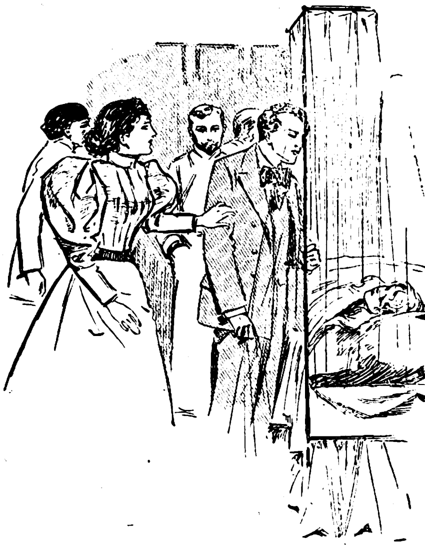
"Thank God for that!" she murmured, and I, too, echoed her words in my heart, though I did not know then how much she meant by them.

Then once more she turned and went to Golden Star's pillow, laying her hand upon her brow again, and looking fondly for a moment on the silent and yet eloquent face that was looking up at her. Then she said to her brother:

"But is she well now? I mean is her physical life certain? Will she live and grow well and strong again?"

"Yes," he answered. "I have done everything that it is in my power to do. I have fulfilled my promise to His Highness. The rest is, as it was with him, merely a matter of care, and nourishment, and nursing."

"Then," she said, with a swift subtle change coming over her manner, "the care and the nursing must be mine, and you two must say good-bye to her for the present until I have nursed her back to health. Of course, you may see her when necessary as her doctor, but only as her doctor, mind. And you, Vilcaroya, must possess yourself with what patience you can until my part of the work is done as well. Now go away, both of you. I am mistress here for the present. Laurens, you go and get ready the nourishment that you think she should take, and come back in half an hour, and tell me how it is to be taken."



"Now go away, both of you."

It was easy for us to see that deep yet kindly meaning of her lightly spoken words, for in them she had told us that Golden Star was now once more a living woman. No longer a mummy, or a corpse, or a "subject," as the Professor had called her; no longer an inanimate thing that had neither sex nor claim to human rights; but a sister woman of her own kind whose wants could only be supplied by her. So we obeyed her, and went away, leaving her there to perform the most sacred task save one that a loving woman could perform.

Djama went to prepare the food that Golden Star would soon need, and I went in search of the Professor and Francis Hartness, and told them all that had happened, and then, when the Professor had gone to bed to finish his broken night's rest, I and he who was my rival in love and who was to be my brother in arms went out from the courtyard into the *patio* which lay in front of the house, sloping down towards the entrance of the little valley in which the hacienda lay, and there, walking to and fro side by side, we talked long and earnestly of many things upon the doing of which my heart was set, and which might now be freely entered upon, seeing that the first object of our journey was already achieved.

Our talk, as you may well believe, was of war and not of love, though it would be hard to say which of the two at that hour most filled our secret thoughts; but, as I have told you, this English soldier was a true man and I trusted him, knowing well that though, when the imperial Llauto once more encircled my brows, I might find courage to seek openly the love of her into whose eyes I had already seen him look with love, yet no falsehood or hatred could ever come between us. So I told him freely of the treasures that I had only to take from their hiding-places to make them mine, and spoke of the use that I would make of them, and took his advice as to the best method of that use.

This he was well able to give me, for I soon found that since he had resolved to throw in his lot with us he had applied himself diligently to the task of studying the work that was to be ours, and seeking the best and readiest means of doing it. In Lima and Arequipa he had bought books and papers from which he had learned, as far as could be learned, the resources and power of the government of Peru, the number of its soldiers and their stations, the names and characters of the men who made the government and of those who were opposed to them, seeking, as he told me was now ever the case in the countries of South America, to overturn the government and to take for themselves the honours and the profits of rule.

He told me—which events soon proved to be the truth—that not many months would pass by before civil war once more broke out. The President and the ministers, who were the tools of his tyranny, had oppressed the people with grievous burdens till they could endure them no longer, and already people in the towns of the interior were refusing to pay taxes, and were arming themselves in secret and meeting in bands among the mountains to practice themselves with their weapons, and make ready for the war which was so soon to come.

All this, as he soon showed me, was happening as though the Fates which ruled the world had especially prepared it for my coming. The people had no leader, save a man that had been himself a tyrant before, and none trusted him, but looked to him only to serve their own ends. Those who had the power were hated, and those who sought to seize it were distrusted. But better than all was the utter and, as far as all men, save ourselves, could see, the hopeless poverty of the country. Long years of plundering had emptied the treasury. Commerce was leaving the shores, and industries were languishing throughout the land. No man trusted his neighbour, for nearly all were in debt, and none could get paid, and my own people, the hewers of wood and drawers of water, the slaves of the children of the Spaniards and the sport of their blind and brutal jesting, had borne their heavy burdens till their backs were sore, sore as their patient hearts were, and they would bear them no longer.

From the country which is called Ecuador, and which in my other life had been Quito, the kingdom of Atahuallpa, to the southern confines of Bolivia, which had once been part of the Land of the Four Regions, the dominions of my own father, all were ready to throw down their long-borne burdens and turn and rend their oppressors and those whose fathers had robbed them of the land that had once been theirs.

I well remember the very words in which Francis Hartness told me all this at much greater length than I have set it down here, and this is what he said when, as the stars were paling in the sky above us and the Eastern mountains were beginning to stand out sharply against the growing light of the coming dawn, our long talk drew to its close.

"In short, Vilcaroya, if I were given to that sort of thing I could believe that the very Fates themselves had conspired to prepare the way for you. You have come back to the world and to your own country at the very moment that these miserable wretches are getting ready to tear each other to pieces. The government is as hopeless as it is impossible, and the popular party, as they cal themselves, have neither a leader that they can trust no money to buy weapons and pay their soldiers with. The treasury is empty, for, so to speak, almost the last dolla has been stolen. The native troops have had no regula pay for months, and I believe they would desert to regiment if they once believed that you are what you are and that you possess, as you do, the means of paying them well and honestly for their help.

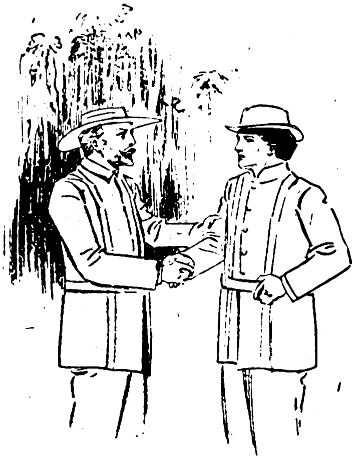
"And, after all, I don't know that even I, as a soldier, could call it desertion under such circumstances. You are of their own blood, the son of one of their ancient kings. These people, these Peruvians, are only mongrel descendants of those who have plundered and oppressed them for centuries. They owe them no allegiance that is worth the name; but you they would hail, not only as their lawful king, but almost as a god—as, indeed, they could well be pardoned for doing, seeing what a marvellous fate yours has been.

"The only thing to do at present, and the only thing in which I see any difficulty, is to get into communication with them in such a way that they shall come to know you without the authorities knowing anything about you or your treasures. If that could be done, I think all the rest would be easy, and then I believe that the moment you raised the flag of the old Incas they would flock to it in thousands, and after that it would only be a matter of military management and leadership."

"And if I will charge myself with that, my friend," I said, as he paused for a moment; "if I will promise you that before six more suns have risen and set, the news of my coming shall be spread far and wide through the land, and yet in such a manner that none but the faithful, the Children of the Blood themselves, shall know anything that could work us harm, will you give me the help of your skill and your knowledge of the arts of this new warfare which is so strange to me? Will you lead my armies to battle and to victory against the oppressors of my people? Will you help me to free this land of my father's from the yoke of its tyrants, and be the war-chieftain of my people, and stand by my throne in the days when the rainbow banner shall once more float over the battlements of the Sacsahuaman and the City of the Sun? If you will you shall have riches and power and all that the heart of man can desire."

"Not all I am afraid, Vilcaroya," he said, interrupting me with a laugh that had but little mirth in it. "Not all, but that would not be in your hands to give. Never mind it is the fortune of war, or, perhaps, I should rather say of love. But for the rest, yes. I believe your cause is a just and righteous one, and what I can do to help it I will. Henceforth we are brothers in arms, even though we may perhaps be rivals in love. There, you have my hand upon it, and with it the word of an Englishman who never broke his word yet to man or woman."

How shall I tell you of the wild exultation with which those brave, honest-spoken words of his filled me? He, the man whom I had feared most, even as I had learned to love him most, was the first to bid me hope—and hope I did now, in spite of all things. So, saying nothing, for my heart was too full for speech, I put my hand in his, and there, as the dawn brightened over the Eastern mountains, we clasped hands in silence and sealed our compact, and when the sun rose swiftly over the now glittering mountain peaks, I let go his hand and bowed myself before it, greeting it as the bringer of a new day, which was to end the long night that had fallen over my land and my people, when the light of my last life was quenched in the darkness of my death-sleep.



"You have my hand upon it."

(To be continued.)

We are going to publish a Magazine.
It will be called

Pearson's Magazine.

It will be beautifully Illustrated. It will be Published Monthly. It will cost Sixpence. The first number will appear on

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12th.

These facts are tersely put. They are to be remembered.

We owe no apology for invading a field apparently, perhaps, adequately occupied. We can truthfully say that **Pearson's Magazine** will resemble no other. Holding an opinion, whether rightly or wrongly, that the whole conception and conduct of the British Magazine as it exists to-day is far behind what it should be, we are endeavouring to issue an ideal one. The whole thing will be so original, will embody so many new ideas, and will give so much for so little, that we confidently expect to see **Pearson's Magazine** take the first rank in popularity and prestige from the very commencement. It will be the finest magazine the world has ever seen at the price. In its artistic and literary merits it will stand alone.

That we are prepared to back this sanguine view is shown by the fact that the First Edition of Number One will consist of **200,000 copies**, while the cost of producing it will exceed **Four Thousand Pounds.**

It has become largely the habit of magazine editors to publish the work of the best writers simply because their names are appended to it. We are not going on this system. Nothing will be printed in **Pearson's Magazine** simply because it is written by an author with a great name. At the same time, every man and woman whose writings have gained great repute will be invited to contribute. We want the best work of the best authors and the best artists, and we shall pay the best prices for it.

Every line of **Pearson's Magazine** will be readable, and everybody may read it. It will be clean without being twaddly.

SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT.

THE

Xmas No. of Pearson's Weekly,

Which will be ready Wednesday, Nov. 13th.

JUST LOOK AT THE ATTRACTIONS IT WILL CONTAIN.

Three Magnificent Coloured Plates, each of which is, to use an Irishism, better than the other.

Splendid and seasonable stories by the following well-known authors: F. Frankfort-Moore, George Griffith, W. L. Alden, Allen Upward, G. B. Burgin, William Le Queux, and others.

The number will be profusely illustrated throughout by some of the best artists of the day. Among them we may mention Harold Piffard, A. Kemp Tebby, Miss Ethel Porter, Raymond Potter, E. F. Sherie, and E. S. Hope.

THIS IS NOT ALL.

Every purchaser will have a chance of gaining **£50.** For particulars of how to acquire this comfortable little sum we must ask you to look in the Xmas No. itself.

And yet our Xmas No. can be bought on November 13th. for Sixpence.

Be sure and place your order with a newsagent at once. There can be no reprint.

Little Miss Justice.

"Yes," I said, "it's the other way about with women. The bigger a man is the bigger whipping he can give you. But it's the little women that pick a man up and stand him on his silly head, like the groom in the 'Arabian Nights.' And by that same token"—here I stirred up Joel with a heavy fire-stick, and roused him to a consciousness of my aphoristic wisdom—"the little women always lose their heads more completely over big men."

"H'm," said Joel, rolling over into perilous proximity to the fire, "I knew a little woman once——"

"That time! O times!" I quoted; "go on with the yarn."

"Shan't," said Joel tersely.

"Very well; don't," I retorted.

For a while we lay and listened to the crackling of the huge wood fire and the soft pad, pad in the darkness, about a pistol shot away.

"Plain little woman, too," said Joel, after a while, in his usual spirit of contrariety, "but pluck enough for three of those cowardly beasts out there."

Pad, pad, went the velvety footsteps out in the darkness.

"Aye," went on Joel, "I was going with a bullock-waggon to Natal. The oxen died, and the rascally Kaffirs cut sticks. I didn't know how to manage things then, and I got a bitter little lesson. Had to leave the waggon and plunder and make tracks for some place to get more men and oxen, and these people gave me a lift; three whites in a waggon and a school of Kaffirs; two women and a man; his wife and her sister; sister the little one. I rode down on them late one evening and explained matters. The man—forget his name—was going to the very place I wanted. So I threw in my lot with theirs for a long trek.

"On the first night I discovered that the man was a brute, and thrashed his wife—a pale, washed-out woman—brutally. Never in my sight, though; he'd have got a pounding for himself. Wife used to sit and cry in the waggon. At nights and stopping places he drank. Sister was a splendid horsewoman; he never touched her. Once he offered to, but she pulled out a revolver and cocked it. 'Pshaw,' he said, and backed down. She'd have perforated him if he hadn't.

"She and I used to ride together. Beautiful riding on that veldt, springy and light. And she could go. Used to talk, too. Never heard anyone else talk like she did.

"Little woman with blue eyes, brown hair, and freckles; but as prettily made as you need wish to see. A little long in the arms, perhaps, but a beautiful hand on a rein. Rode a hard-mouthed brute called Timon—black, and with the tricks of a fiend. Bit like a savage puppy. Her bridle-straps were all double thickness, and she rode him with a curb. I was powerful sorry to leave her when we reached Hapsburgh. Wouldn't have done, neither, if she'd given me a hint to stay. We outspanned a mile from Hapsburgh, and I calculated to ride in in the morning.

"'Good-bye,' I said, in a babyfied fashion.

"'Good-bye, Mr. Black,' she said, and gave me a hand in her grave way. I could have wrung it off in my pain.

"I rode off early next morning, and was half a mile on my way when I heard the sound of flying hoofs. I I turned. It was Timon and she. I stopped.

"'Mr. Black,' she cried, and I could scarcely hear what she said, the words were so broken with either grief or passion.

"'You're a man,' she gasped out, 'for the sake of your name come back and flog him.'

"'Who?' I said.

"'Him,' she gasped out again, 'he has beaten her within an inch of her life in one of his fits. If you are a man come back and flog him, or I shall shoot him dead.'

"I turned to the strangest errand ever mortal entered on. She hurled her black brute at every gully and water-hole that came in our way, and rode over smooth ground like one possessed. My swift little mare had her work cut out in keeping up with her. She used no whip to Timon, but the knuckles of her brown hand were snow-white with the grip of her fingers on the loose curb rein. At last we rode up to the waggon with the cattle clustered round it. I stopped.

"'Jack,' I said (her name was Joanna, but they called her Jack), 'I won't do this for nothing.'

"Her face fell.

"'I want pay,' I said, 'I want a kiss and then I will flog the brute if you like.'

"She hesitated, and then put up her lips. Her face was wet with the perspiration of our headstrong ride, and hot with anger, but I laid her cheek to mine, and kissed the stern mouth beneath my lifted hat.

"'Go,' she said, 'go.'

"I went to the waggon. He was glowering in a corner. His wife lay deadly pale on the rough pallet bed, a great red weal across her face.

"'Come out,' I shouted, in my fierce anger, which was her anger. He struck at me with the stock-whip he held in his hand.

"I dragged him out and twisted the whip from his grasp. Then I lashed him till the blood poured like rain. You know what a stock-whip of hippopotamus hide is, and what it can do. I struck fiercely and tirelessly at his writhing, struggling body, and she sat looking on from her great black horse like a shape of stone.

"At last I flung him down and went across to her.

"He pulled a revolver from somewhere and fired at me. The bullet struck her on the temple."

Joel's voice failed.

Pad, pad, went the soft feet in the darkness.

"What did you do?" I asked involuntarily.

"Left him out on the veldt without a fire. In the morning there were a few bones. Every time I see a pair of eyes like that in the dark"—Joel pointed to two gleaming orbs before him—"I feel as if they were his, and I do this——"

Joel took up his rifle and levelled it.

Spal-ang!

There was a hideous yell, and the eyes went out.

Joel rolled over again, and in the quiet of the night, when I roused myself to pile more wood on the fire, I heard him say "Jack," and then, "Come out, you brute."

Geo. Knight.

An - Unfortunate - Attachment.

THE little seaside village of Caveton may have a future before it or not; it certainly has not as yet shown any signs of development; the few houses that together formed the small fishing and, we fear it must be said, smuggling hamlet in what now seems to be a bygone age, still remain, and have only been added to from time to time by a mixture between a villa and a cottage, and probably not a score of these within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

In fact, the little place remains what it always has been—out of the beaten track; and the few visitors who find their way to it summer after summer are either artists or enthusiastic sea-fishermen.

It was, therefore, matter for wonder amongst the quiet village folk what could have induced the grand lady—for she was a grand lady, being none other than the Lady Eva Bateman—to come and settle down for a whole month, and at the conclusion of that period, which she announced when she arrived first was to be the duration of her visit, to show no signs of moving from the pretty rooms in the small cottage, where she and an elderly lady, her aunt, had established themselves.

She did not go in for painting, but used to roam about the place, a big black retriever her sole companion.

There was a pensive look about her face, which, coupled with the fact that on the third finger of her left hand she wore a wedding-ring, had given rise to the idea that she had been married, but to whom or when nobody troubled to inquire.

And so the time went on, the village folk had become accustomed to her presence; the children in the street curtseyed to her when she passed by, and the rough fisher folk removed their short clay pipes and touched their hats to her.

She was not absolutely without society, or rather companionship. The beach around Caveton, is, as its name implies, prolific in caves, and at low tide these are easily accessible, but at high water their existence is not discernible, a fact of which the bold smugglers in the early forties were well aware.

One day in the course of her explorations of one of these caverns Lady Bateman found, when it was too late, that the tide had risen and effectually cut off her retreat. Fortunately for her, her dangerous predicament had been observed by one of the two or three artists just then staying in the place, Archie Wallace, and, being an active young fellow, he had lost no time in descending the cliff—it was not very precipitous—and removed the lady to a ledge of rock out of the reach of high water, remaining with her until the tide receded, when it was possible to return the way she had come.

Now, the fact of being left alone for several hours in a position of more or less imminent danger, with a strikingly handsome young man who has just, at the risk of his own life, saved her own, cannot fail to make its influence felt on a woman, be she ever so reserved, and the natural consequence of the adventure was that Archie Wallace, having escorted his fair charge to the door of her cottage, was by her asked in; formally introduced to the aunt, and in a very short time found himself on terms of intimacy with the two ladies.

This had been upwards of three weeks ago, and the important sea piece on which the young artist had staked his reputation had not made much progress in the interval.

At the time this story commences he was sitting idly on the beach, looking dreamily at the sea before him, and thinking, as he always was, of her.

And she? Was she reciprocating his thoughts, or what?

We shall not be accused of playing the part of Peeping Tom, perhaps, if we venture to glance inside the cottage where she resides. Her aunt, good soul, has fallen placidly asleep. Rollo, the retriever, is lying at his mistress' feet, and she is in the act of writing a long letter to one of her bosom friends; an extract from it will serve our purpose:

"You can't imagine what he is like, so it is no use my attempting to describe him to you. . . Know, then, that he is different in every respect to the men you and I are accustomed to meet; that he is a gentleman you will have gathered from my previous letters, but he is more than that. He is the very soul and embodiment of all that is honourable and true. He might in the Middle Ages have been a man amongst men, even in those days when chivalry to women was a more common attribute of man's character than it is now; and, do you know, he reveres me, and, in fact, looks upon me as something almost too good to live.

"Think of that, my dear. . . And yet he has never said a word that could be construed into anything—you know what I mean. . . . Is it not refreshing in this nineteenth century to find such a man? and, having found, can you wonder at my staying on here?

"I came away wanting an entire change, a new sensation in life, and it cannot be said I have failed to succeed in discovering it; and yet at times I am half sorry.

"Heigh ho! what's the use of moralising. I may be in a fool's paradise, but I will enjoy it while I can, and now, dear——" the sentence remained unfinished, for at that moment she recognised a well-known footstep on the stairs, and in another instant the man she had been describing, with a "may I come in?" and not waiting for an answer, had entered the room.

He was undeniably handsome as he stood there, boating cap in hand, as the glint of the fast setting sun shone upon his curly hair—a mere boy he looked, although reference to the old family Bible would have revealed the fact that he was in his twenty-fourth year.

"What a shame to stop in such an evening as this. Won't you come down to the beach and see the sun set? It is going to be a glorious evening, and I shan't have an opportunity of seeing many more of them."

"Are you going away, then?"

"Yes; I have exceeded the limit of holiday I had allowed myself, by a good bit, even now, but it has been so pleasant here. I have been loth to tear myself away," he added in a serious tone. "But you will come, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll come," and, putting her hat on, she led the way, Rollo, as usual, testifying his pleasure at going out; and the old lady dozed pleasantly on.

It was, as he had said, a magnificent sunset, well worth coming out to see; and, possibly, it was the grandeur of the scene that led both of them to keep a silence for a while, which she was the first to break.

"How lovely it all is! Let us take the boat and go for a row."

Had she said let us take a balloon, he would have been only too willing to honour her, and with a strong push of his lusty arms, he soon had the boat—her boat he had come to call it—afloat, and having seen that she was comfortably seated in the stern, was quickly pulling out towards the golden West.

If it had been pleasant on the beach, it was doubly so on the water, and as the oars splashed in the sea, and the light glanced on the ripples they made on the oily surface, it was a scene to arouse the artistic sympathies of the rower; and he looked, as, indeed, he was, supremely happy.

Presently he rested on his oars, and looked at his companion with unmistakable adoration expressed in his glance.

She felt its influence and shivered unconsciously.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she asked petulantly.

"Because I can't help it," he replied simply. "You ought to be an angel."

The remark was said in all honesty, there was an unmistakable ring of truth about it, but it did not please her; on the contrary she was annoyed.

"My dear boy, angels only exist in the imagination. At any rate, no woman is an angel or a saint either; I know I am not."

"I should be sorry to think otherwise."

"Oh, Archie, you are too good for this world. You have formed an altogether erroneous impression of me, but in time you will have come to see things in quite a different light—forgotten all about me, in fact."

"I can never do that."

"Oh, yes you will, when some new fancy seizes you. We have been excellent friends, haven't we? Well, why not let us remain so—until—until—you tire of me?"

For a moment the man looked at her earnestly, and then, letting his oars drop from his hands, he leant towards her, and before she knew what he was doing, had seized one of her hands in his, and looking at her in a way that made her wince, it was so passionately intreating, said in a choking voice: "Eva, I can never tire of you, for I love you—love you better than life itself—it's no use telling me that no women are angels when I know one that is. I have never dared to say this to you before, but when you looked like you did just now I couldn't help it."

"Oh, you foolish boy," murmured her ladyship as if to herself. "Do you know the greatest kindness I could do would be to destroy your faith in human nature once and for ever?"

"You can destroy my faith in every human being save one, and I should not mind; but you will always be the same to me, a woman beyond compare. I did not think I could ever have dared to speak to you as I have done, but it is out at last, and oh! my darling"—with a look of longing affection—"have you nothing to say to me? No word of hope—of—love? Things couldn't go on for ever as they have done, and I want you to decide when we shall end our old life and begin the new. I want you to——"

"Stop," she said. "Don't ask me—don't ask me to be your wife."

"And why? You cannot fail to have seen my affection for you. I love you, Eva, and——"

She broke into a short laugh. "Oh, you silly boy, why couldn't you take things, take—things—sensibly?"

"I—I don't know what you mean," he said blankly.

"Poor boy—why will you take life so seriously? Why couldn't you have let things be? We have been very happy—you and I—why not have let it remain so?"

"I don't think I quite understand. I am not much used to woman's ways. Do you—do you mean—there is some reason why you can't marry me?"

"There is—the best of all reasons. I am married already."

"You have been, you mean—your husband is dead."

A burning flush overspread her face. "No. He is alive."

The water soughed against the bows of the boat; the tide had turned; both sat as if spell-bound. "Will he never speak?" she said to herself. At last his mouth framed the one word:

"Alive!"

There was something awful in the expression of his voice; it was that of an old man.

"Alive," he repeated, his voice by degrees assuming a more natural tone, "and you never told me."

"You never asked me," with an attempt at a smile.

"I believed in you," was his simple rejoinder.

She looked at him, and her whole heart went out to him. "Oh, Archie, I never thought it would come to this; believe me I didn't. I was so miserable. I wanted a change from the dreamy, dreary life I am compelled to lead, and you came in my way, and you were different to all other men I have ever met. It was good to be with you, and you never seemed to be in earnest, and——"

He turned the boat's head sharply round, and pulled as if his life depended upon his exertion. His face was hard set and resolute, and as she watched him she felt a keen pang of remorse.

"If you had not taken things so seriously, if you could only have made love to me as other men have done."

"I couldn't," he said, in a choking voice, "for I loved you. God help me."

With a harsh, grating sound the boat touched the beach; he held her head up by the painter, but made no sign to assist his companion to step out, and to steady herself she placed her hand on his arm.

With a rough gesture he shook it off.

Then she fairly broke down. "Archie, won't you say you forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive."

"Won't you say good-bye, then?"

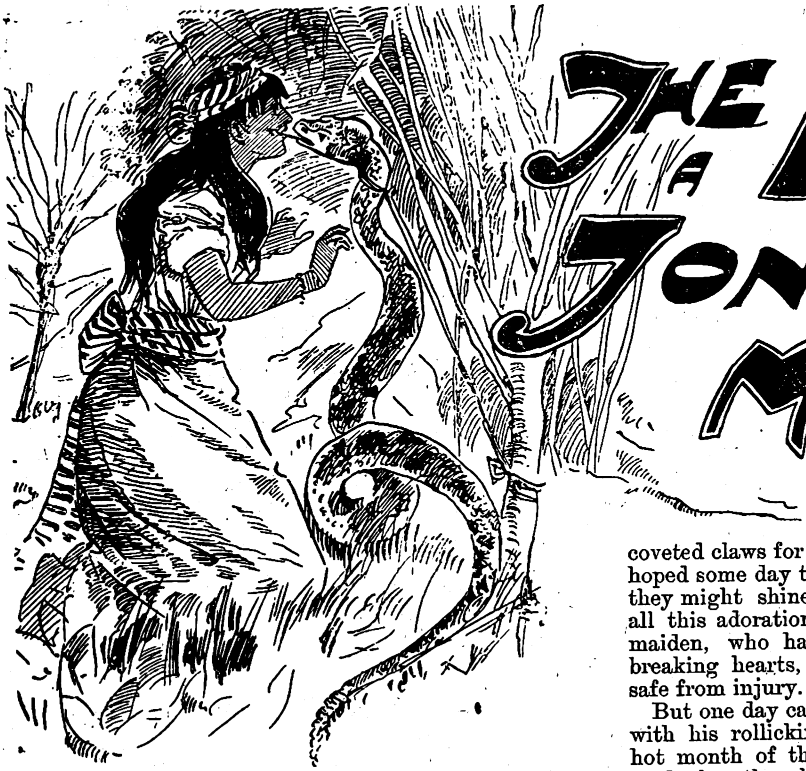
"Good-bye. You have a husband, go to him; you belong to him; and he to you."

"You are cruel. Have I not told you how miserable my life is? Will you make it a little more bearable by being my friend?"

"Friend! do you know what you say—you who have robbed me of everything that makes life worth living? Until I knew you I believed that women were good, that they were sent into the world to be a comfort to us men who are willing to work for them, die for them, if need be—but friends! No, the dream is passed, and by dint of hard work I may in time be able to forget that it ever existed;" and he strode away over the rocks, and she was left there standing alone.

"Why would he take life so seriously? After all, we might have been the best of friends."

S. J. F. Newbery.



THE LOVE OF A TONTO MAIDEN.

THE scarlet sumac is the colour of a Tonto maiden's headband, and the red willows in White River Cañon are the colour of a Tonto maiden's cheek.

She sat embowered in sumac and red willows. The grey rocks of one side of the cañon rose behind her. In front, ten feet away, the foaming White River sang its unending song. She sat motionless, her feet crossed beneath her, her elbows resting on her knees, and her face supported by her hands. How many hours she had sat thus only the Great Spirit knew.

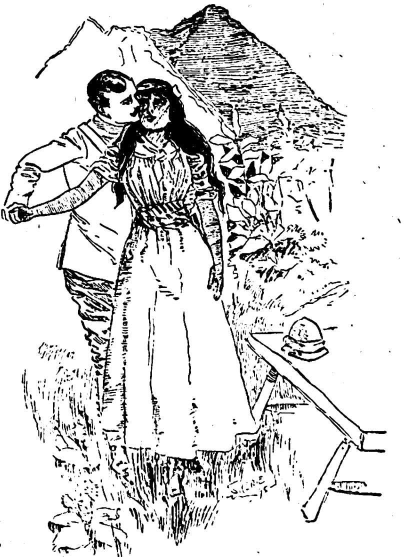
How many nights had fallen upon the gloomy cañon, how many suns had filled it with glory, how many days she had been without food—although there was meat within reach of her hand—how long she had been without even a draught of water—although the river surged so near—she neither knew nor cared. She felt no fatigue, although she had walked without stopping for even a moment's rest from the Tonto basin to this cañon that dropped from the back line of the quarters at Fort Apache.

It was here that he said he would meet her if ever she wished to see him. She was to come to this cañon, and just as the echoes of the sunset gun died away, she was to utter the cry of the grey coyote thrice, and he would come to her.

She firmly believed him. It did not seem strange to her that a handsome young white man, who wore yellow straps on his shoulders, and commanded a troop of cavalry (when his captain and first lieutenant were on detached service), should love a little Tonto maiden.

The young men of the village round her father's were each and all of them mad for love of her. They called her "Mountain Flower," and "Spring Dew," and "Rock Rose." They killed bears to provide her with coveted claws for her necklaces, and each and all of them hoped some day to kill a white man or two, in order that they might shine with more glory in her eyes. And all this adoration had made her a spoiled little Tonto maiden, who had learned the coquette's delight in breaking hearts, and the art of keeping her own very safe from injury.

But one day came a laughing, blue-eyed, white soldier with his rollicking troop of cavalry, to camp during a hot month of the summer, close by their own village. And when the white man had looked at her and smiled she had taken her heart at once from its safe hiding place, and given it to him just as though she had been guarding it all her life for his coming. And he understood, for the white soldiers, especially the young men, are very keen in affairs of love.



For a month she was the happiest young woman in the world. Her old father shook his head and warned her against everything white. She laughed at him. The young men frowned and walked stealthily about, muttering threats. She laughed at them. The white man, she told them, could kill them all.

She felt very secure as well as happy, for was she not the most beautiful woman that had ever been seen of living man? She had never seen a white woman, and her ideas of them were rather contemptuous. They were as lilies, and could be destroyed by the pressure of two fingers. Besides, if there were any possible white rival, she and the other would fight with knives and clubs, and she would kill her, proudly, before the very eyes of the white man himself.

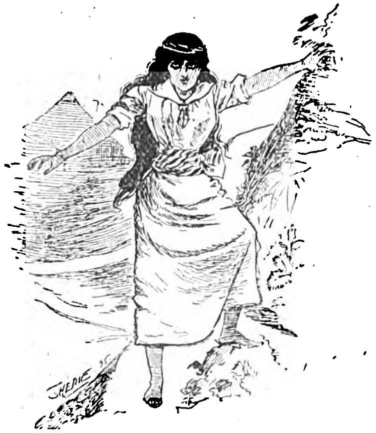
The white man had never told her that he would take her to wife, but she was very sure that it was merely a question of a few moons ere he would buy her from her father and take her to his own wickiup, somewhere where there was a large village of the white soldiers. Indeed, he never seemed serious in anything, but laughed a great deal, which was very different from the manner of the surly young men of her own race. Sometimes he held her hand for a little while, and stroked her glossy black hair; but he never went further in his love-making until one day when he and his soldiers suddenly broke camp and moved away.

On that day he took her for a short jaunt, and told her where he was going, and how she could find the place. And he told her about the cañon and the great gun that was fired at sunset, and bade her, if she wanted him, to give the coyote call in the cañon. She did not know that he shrewdly suspected she would be persecuted after his departure for her too evident preference for him.

And then he put his arm round her, and touched his lips very lightly to her cheek—a caress that seemed very odd and unusual to her, but at the same time very delightful. He told her that he would come back some day—a statement which he made quite unthinkingly, but which gave her great hope and joy. And then he rode away, very bravely, at the head of his band of white braves.

The white man was not mistaken as to the treatment she would receive after he had gone. Her father beat her and scolded her. Her mother made her do the work of four women, and gave her only leavings from each meal to eat. The young men who once worshipped her now taunted her and boasted how they would have killed her white man if her love had been worth it.

The young girls, in fact all the women, laughed at her, and it almost seemed as though her pony hung his head in shame, although he had formerly been the wildest and proudest in the drove. But he was no longer her pony now, for her father had taken him away and given him to a younger sister.



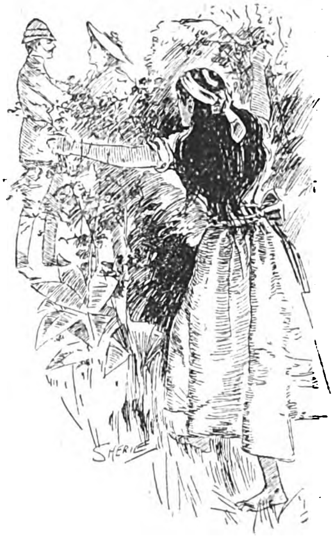
She clambered down the steep trail.

But Kanahee bore it all very bravely. Had not the white man promised to come back? And when he did come back he would buy her far more ponies and blankets than her father could get for all his other daughters put together. Then it would be her turn to taunt the young men and laugh at the young girls.

She counted the days through the first moon, and he did not come. She counted the days through the second, and it was the same. At the end of the third moon her heart was heavy with doubt and fear. She no longer counted the days, but worked on and suffered silently.

Six moons had passed, and she could endure it no longer. One night, when the village was asleep, she took her knife and enough food to last her for a few days, and started out on the trail in the direction the white man had indicated. Three days and nights she walked, and on the morning of the fourth she sank down on one side of White River Cañon, and saw the smoke rise from the barracks of the white soldiers on the other.

Her heart leapt with joy. She clambered down the steep trail to the river, and drank, and ate. Then she hid in the red willows and waited till sunset. A trail ran by the side of the river on this bank, and the rocks rose abruptly from the mad waters on the other. So she knew that when he came it would be by this trail.



The white man held out his arms.

At sunset she heard the great gun, and it would have frightened her had not her mind been so intent on the cry of the coyote. Three times she uttered that peculiar wail, and three times she heard the echoes run up and down the cañon until it seemed as though a whole pack were yelping round her. She could hear the answering bark of dogs, and knew that the sound must have been carried to his ears. Then she crept into a bunch of red willows and waited.

He came. But he did not come at her call. He did not come for her, and he did not come alone. Walking behind him on the trail was a pale young girl in a snow-white dress. She was so beautiful that Kanahee sank on her knees and dared not breathe. She would have thought it a spirit from the land of the dead had she not heard her laugh in a low, rippling way that sounded like the song of a bird.

Kanahee felt a pain at her heart as though she had been struck by an arrow. Who was this wonderful white girl, with hair like a sunrise and clothes like the flying clouds? What was she to him? Did the white man think her more beautiful than Kanahee? Her heart sank when she asked herself this question, for she knew that she was ugly and homely compared to this vision in white.

But she would not give up. She would not believe that he had a false heart until she was sure. She would wait. And meanwhile she would try the snake. It is not a pretty superstition, this of the snake, nor one that is likely to be adopted by Kanahee's more civilised sisters. But a Tonto maiden firmly believes that she can read in the eyes of a rattlesnake her fate in love—provided she captures the snake alive herself.

Kanahee waited until morning, and when the first rattlesnake, warmed by the early rays of the sun, thrust its head out of a hole in the rocks near by, she deftly slipped over it a noose that she had made in a strip of buckskin, and held it prisoner. Then she again sought her hiding-place of sumac and red willow.

Either end of the strip of buckskin she tied to a willow about six inches from the ground, thus securing her snake with his head erect and his body writhing on the ground. Then she sat down before him, and looked into his fiery eyes. The eyes blazed, the fangs darted in and out, and the body writhed, but the eyes told her nothing of love.

For hours she sat motionless. For hours she rocked herself to and fro and moaned. Night came and day came. Night came again and day again, and still she watched patiently before the maddened snake. But the white man did not come again, and the snake's eyes told her nothing of love.

It was evening of the third day when she heard a footfall. She peered through the bushes and saw him again. Again the pale girl in the white dress was walking daintily behind him. They stopped in the trail directly in front of her. The tall white man turned and held out his arms. The girl walked up to him with a beautiful smile, and laid her head gently on his shoulder. He folded his arms about her and kissed her on the cheek, just as he had kissed Kanahee. He smiled and whispered in her ear. And then he said playfully two words, and the pale girl laughed. The two words were "sisagi," and "manana."

Kanahee knew what both words meant. "Sisagi" was the Indian word for "sweetheart" or "darling," "manana" the Mexican word, and by usage also the Indian word for "to-morrow."

The lovers moved slowly away. Kanahee waited until they were out of sight, and then she leant slowly towards her rattlesnake. She presented her cheek to it, and the snake struck furiously at the very spot where the white man had kissed her. It buried its fangs with its utmost strength, but Kanahee merely smiled. She loosened the strip of buckskin from the willows, and the snake hurriedly glided away, carrying the strip with it. Then Kanahee lay down on the grass and burst into tears.

* * * * *

No human being ever saw Kanahee after she left her father's wickiup. Even her body was never found. For the scarlet sumac is the colour of a Tonto maiden's head-band and the red willows in White River Cañon are the colour of a Tonto maiden's cheek. And even the vultures disdain the prey of the rattlesnake.

Richard Sibert.

A SHORT WOOING.

Helena V—— was the eldest daughter of a Polish nobleman. Her mother had died in giving birth to a second daughter when Helena was scarcely three years old, and her father, disappointed at having no son to inherit his estates, conceived the strange notion of bringing up his eldest daughter as a boy.

Accordingly, she was dressed in boy's garments, her name was changed to Alexander, and she was taught riding, fencing, and all other manly exercises.

Helena grew up tall and strong, a bold rider and swimmer, and a most dexterous fencer and gymnast. Moreover, she astonished her tutor by her marvellous progress in all her studies.

In spite of her exclusively masculine education, however, she preserved a sweetness and gentleness of demeanour that was eminently feminine, added to which, she was gifted with rare beauty, which was enhanced by her magnificent physique and radiant health.

As womanhood advanced, the feminine part of her nature developed more and more. She became more devoted to study and reflection, and less inclined to take part in her father's pursuits, in which she had hitherto been his constant companion.

The Count began to realise that his scheme was unnatural and impossible, and resolved to abandon it. He sent for his daughter, informed her of his decision, and desired her to lay aside her masculine attire, and resume her baptismal name of Helena. She now devoted herself entirely to feminine occupations and the education of her little sister; but scarcely a year afterwards the cholera broke out in the village near which they lived, and the Count and his youngest daughter were among the earliest victims. Helena went to live with her uncle and aunt, who came to her directly they heard of the great affliction and sorrow which had befallen her.

Very shortly after she went to live with them the revolution of 1861 broke out, and Count Pitowsky joined the insurgents, leaving his wife and niece in the lonely house almost unprotected, for he took most of his servants and tenants with him.

After his departure the two women waited day by day in painful suspense for news of him; but none came. A rumour reached them once that there had been an encounter, but no particulars were given, and the news only increased their anxiety.

Late one night, just as they were retiring to rest, they heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs in the stone courtyard. Helena, who was in her aunt's rooom, ran downstairs and met one of the servants, who told her that a soldier wished to speak to her immediately. She went into the kitchen, and a tall man sitting near the table rose up and came unsteadily forward to meet her.

"I am carrying a message to the general of the Polish Army," he said hurriedly. "The Russians are going to surprise them to-morrow morning. I have to ride to K——, sixty miles beyond the village below here, and my horse has just dropped dead at your door. Can you give me another horse? I must get to K—— before morning."

He stopped short, reeled, and, before Helen could reach him, fell heavily in a dead faint on the stone floor.

Helena called for assistance, and vainly tried for nearly an hour to restore the unconscious man. The conviction forced itself upon her that he would not be able to reach his destination that night, and the result would be a terrible disaster to the Polish Army. Must her brave countrymen—her uncle, too, and his followers—perish for lack of a few words of warning? A thousand times no! The brave girl soon made up her mind. She went to her aunt and told her how matters stood.

"Alas, alas!" cried the Countess, wringing her hands. "What is to be done?"

"Listen!" said Helena. "I will go. I will saddle Peter and start at once. The road is straight, and by morning I shall have reached K——, and saved the army and my dear uncle."

For a while the Countess strenuously refused to let her niece depart at dead of night, alone and unattended, upon such a dangerous mission, but at length she yielded to Helena's urgent intreaties and passionate arguments, and with many tears gave an unwilling consent.

The young girl went to her room, and choosing out some of the male attire her father used to make her wear, hastily dressed herself in it, and covered her luxuriant black hair with a close-fitting cap. Then she loaded a couple of pistols, and, putting some spare ammunition into her pockets, went downstairs. The three women servants looked up terrified and amazed as she entered the kitchen.

"It is I," said Helena quietly, and bending over the still unconscious messenger, she drew from his breast the precious missive addressed to the Polish General. Then, after a brief explanation, received by the astonished servants in dead silence, she went to the stable, and saddled the one horse her uncle left behind.

"Thou hast a long journey to-night, Peter," she said, as she buckled his rein and patted his neck. The horse sniffed the air, and trembled. He scented the dead body of the messenger's unfortunate steed, which lay in the courtyard. Helena led him past it and through the gates into the road. Then she sprang into the saddle, and galloped away into the darkness. For about an hour Peter went like the wind. Then he slackened down into a steadier pace. They had to pass through a thick forest, and Helena hoped that by the time this was reached the moon would be up, and give sufficient light for her to see the path.

She entered the forest about half-past one, and rode for nearly an hour in dense gloom. Then, at last, the moon shone faintly between the trees, and she breathed more freely. Suddenly Peter snorted and plunged, nearly throwing his rider as he dashed forward at a gallop. Helena turned in her saddle, and saw behind her the grey shadowy forms of two huge wolves. With a thrill the thought flashed across her that unless she could kill them or frighten them away they might perhaps bring the whole pack down on her.

But there was also another consideration. There might be spies or Russian outposts in the forest, and if reports of a pistol rang through the night, she might be pursued by men instead of wolves. In either case the danger was imminent. She looked back again. One of the beasts, swifter than its companion, was already at her horse's heels. Suddenly he made a dart forward, and snapped at Helena's boot. The next instant she had drawn her pistol and shot him dead. The report of the weapon reverberated again and again, and awoke a thousand slumbering echoes. The surviving wolf threw itself upon the body of its companion, and began ravenously devouring it, while horse and rider sped away.

Dawn broke, and Peter began to show signs of fatigue.

Helena would have fain spared him, but she dared not slacken speed until the goal was reached. At last a row of white tents appeared upon the horizon.

"Courage, Peter," said his mistress; "our journey is nearly ended."

About a mile further on Helena suddenly perceived a horseman riding towards her.

She pulled up, and hesitated whether to go on or to draw into the shade of a grove of trees and allow him to pass by. As he drew nearer, she saw to her horror that he was a Russian officer.

There was nothing for it, however, but to ride on. As she came up to him, she recognised a young man whom she used frequently to meet at her father's house before the Insurrection broke out, and who had on more than one occasion intimated his love for her, and his hope that he might some day be permitted to pay his addresses to her. She attempted to ride past him, but he stopped her.

"What is your business here, young man?"

"Ivan Kharkoff, have you forgotten me?" said Helena.

He started. "I know your voice, but——"

"I am Helena——"

"Helena! But why are you here and in male attire? Where are you going? How did you get past the Russian outposts?"

"I rode all night through the forest."

Kharkoff uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"You must return with me," he said. "My orders are to let no one pass."

Helena burst into tears. "Oh, let me go," she intreated. "My uncle is dying, and I am going to nurse him."

"You are not telling me the truth," said Ivan sternly. "I cannot let you pass."

Then Helena, seeing that all was lost, told him everything. With passionate eloquence she pleaded her cause; the fact that her uncle and aunt were her only relatives, and that she was dependent upon them.

"If you will not let me warn my uncle of his danger," she cried, "to-night will see his wife a widow and both of us homeless, friendless, and ruined."

"No," rejoined Ivan passionately, "never while I am alive, Helena, my love! Come with me, and I will guard you with my life and fill the place of all that you have lost."

"How can I wed my uncle's murderer?" said Helena. "Oh, Ivan, Ivan, let me go!"

"My honour is at stake," he replied.

"Our encounter is a mere accident. Who will know of it? Your men are in some other direction, and you have ridden out here to reconnoitre on your own responsibility. Go back and forget that you have seen me. Ah, Ivan, if you ever loved me, let me go."

Her beauty, her tears, and intreaties at last prevailed with the man who loved her.

"Well, be it so," he said. "Your horse is weary. Take mine," and he dismounted.

Helena threw herself at his feet, and covered his hands with kisses. He raised her, and pressed her tenderly to his breast.

"Tell me that you loved me—that you love me still," he murmured.

"I love you," replied Helena. "I shall love you till I die."

Then she mounted the Russian's horse, and rode away towards the distant camp.

Ivan watched her till her figure was but a speck upon the horizon. Then he turned the muzzle of his pistol against his breast and shot himself through the heart.

Amy Montague.

LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

I.—The Jealousy of Mrs. Tutt.

"BEIN' single mys'f that away," observed the old cattle-man, breaking what had been a long period of silence, "females is ondoubted what Doctor Peets calls a theory with me. But nevertheless, in an onpresumin' lowly way I gives it as my meager jedgment, an' I gives it cold, as how a jealous woman is worse than trant'lers.

"She's plumb locoed for one thing; an' thar ain't no such thing as organisin' to meet her game. For mys'f, I don't want no transactions with 'em; none whatever.

"If I'm thinkin' of folks in particular in connection herewith, it's Dave Tutt an' his wife. Dave an' she's all right now; but thar's shorely a period when she runs on her rope, an' bucks an' pitches to that degree it looks like she's due to bust them bands between her an' Tutt like cobwebs.

"This yere domestic uprisin' breaks on Wolfville as onexpected as a fifth ace in a poker deck, an' leaves the camp all spraddled out. Benson Annie is the lady's name, an' I reckon mebby she an' Dave's been wedded goin' on six months. The camp attends the nuptials in a body, an' followin' of the festivities, Annie an' Dave tumbles into housekeepin' peaceful as two pups in a basket.

"Wolfville's proud of 'em, an' everytime some ignorant bein' asks about Wolfville, an' the social features of the camp, we allers mentions Tutt an' his wife; an' tells how they keeps house; sorter upholsterin' of our bluff.

"It's mighty likely a month before the time Annie breaks through Dave's lines this way. Dave an' me's due to go over towards the Tres Hernanas about some cattle. Likewise, thar's an English outfit allowin' they'll go along some tomsee, where they've been stackin' in heavy on some ranch lands. They was eager for Dave an' me to trail along with 'em; an' sorter ride head on 'em, an' keep 'em from gettin' mixed up with the scenery—which the same is shorely complicated in the foot hills of the Tres Hernanas—an' losin' themselves a heap.

"'Which you'd better do it boys,' says Enright. 'S'pose they be some trouble. It's a mighty sight better than havin' 'em go p'intin' a off lone that way. They shore misses the way out if they does, an' the first we all knows these yere Britons will be runnin' Cimmaron in the hills, scarin' innocent folks, an' stampedin' the cattle plumb off the range. It's easier to get along careful with 'em, an' bring 'em back.'

"It comes, then, that one mornin' Dave and me an' these yere aliens lines out for the hills. They've got ponies, an' waggons, an' camp outfit to that extent, a casual onlooker might think they aims to be away in the hills for years.

"As we p'ints out from the O.K. House, where these Britons has been wrastlin' their chuck pendin' the start, Ann is thar sayin' good-bye to Dave. I notes then, she ain't seemin' tickled to death none; but don't seem nothin' special of it.

"The Britons is made up of two men, mebby as old as Enright—brothers is what they be—an' a female, who's the daughter of one of 'em. Which thar's nothin' recent or kittenish about this yere lady, though; an' I reckons she's shore forty years old. I learns later, however, it's this female which Annie resents when she says 'Adios' to Dave.

"It shore strikes me now, when years is past, as some marvellous how a han'some corn-fed female like Annie manages to find a fight with Dave over this yere towerist woman. I'm nacherally slow to go decidin' bets agin a lady's looks, but whatever Annie sees in the appearance of this person which is likely to inveigle Dave, is too many for me. I softens the statement a heap when I says she's uglier than a Mexican sheep.

"However, that don't seem to occur to Annie; an' Doc Peets—who's the wisest sharp in Arizona—allows to me afterwards as how Annie was cuttin' the cards with hers'f desperate to see whether she declares war or not at the very time we make our start. If she does she turns the low card; for she don't say nuthin', an' we gets away, an' all is profound peace.

"Four days later we're in camp by a water-hole in the frill of the foothills. The Britons has got up a wall tent, an' is shorely havin' a high an' lavish time. Dave an' me ain't payin' no attention to 'em speshul, as none is needed or should be. Besides, we has some hard ridin' to do, lookin' up places for a line of sign camps.

"It's the second day when we notices an outfit of Apaches camped down the valley from us. They're all serene an' peaceful enough; with squaws, papooses, an' dogs; an' ain't thinkin' no more of bein' hostile than we be.

"Of course, no sooner does these yere Britons of ours behold this band of savages than they has to go projectin' an' pesterin' round 'em.

"That's the worst thing about a towerist; he's that loaded with curiosity an' that gregar'ous an' amiable, he has to go foolin' round every stranger he tracks up with. In their ignorance they even gets rood an' insultin' at times. I knows 'em who's that regardless an' imperlite as to ask a rank stranger that away, to pass 'em his gun to look at.

"And so as I says no sooner does them Apaches get near us than these three blessed foreigners is over after 'em ropin' at 'em with questions an' invadin' of 'em an' examinin' of 'em like the whole Apache tribe's for sale an' they aims to stand in on the play an' acquire 'em if figgers is reasonable.

"I never does know what the female towerist says or does to that partic'ler aborigine, nuthin', most likely; but it ain't a day when one of 'em Injuns settles it with himse'f he wants to wed her. The towerist is in ignorance of the views of this savage who goes about dealin' his game Injun fashion.

"It's this way; Dave an' me trails in one evenin' some weary an' played. It's been a hard ride that day. But the first thing we lays eyes on at the camp shorely livens us up a lot. Thar, tied to the waggon wheels is nine ponies, which the same belongs to the Apaches.

"'Whatever be these yere bronchos doin' yere?' says Dave, for we allows the first card outen the box, mebby the Briton makes a purchase.

"One of the towerists tells a long an' delighted story about the generosity of the Apaches.

"'Actooaly,' says this towerist, 'these generous savages leads up them nine ponies an' donates 'em.'

"Dave an' me asks questions; an' all thar is to the deal—which it's shore enough to bust Dave's family before it's over—these Injuns brings up the nine ponies all respectful, an' leaves 'em hobbled out, mebby it's a hundred yards from the Britons, an' rides away. The Britons deemin' this bluff as in the line of gifts, capers over an' possesses themselves of the ponies an' leads 'em in. That's the outside of the story.

"'Well, stranger,' says Dave, in reply, takin' of the towerist a one side, 'I ain't aimin' to discourage you none, but you-alls has gone an' got some tangled up in your lariat.'

"'What for a entanglement is it?" asks the towerist.

"'Nuthin,' says Dave, sorter breakin' it to him easy; 'nuthin', only you've done married your daughter to one of them Apaches.'

"When Dave announces this yere truth it shore looks like the Briton's goin' to need whiskey to uphold himse'f. But he reorganises, an' Dave explains that the Injuns, when they trails in with the ponies, is simply shufflin' the cards for a weddin'; offerin' a price for the woman.

"'An' when you all hops out an' leads in the ponies,' says Dave, 'that does settle it. You agrees to deal right thar. To-morrow, now, this yere buck, whoever he is, will come surgin' in with his relations plumb down to third cousins; an' he expects you'll be dead ready to feed 'em, an' wind up the orgy by givin' over the bride.'

"These recitals of Dave's is plenty horrible to the towerist. He allows we must keep it from his daughter; an' then he puts his whole outfit in our hands, to get 'em safe out o' high grounds.

"'Can't we pull our freight in the night?' says the towerist, an' he's shorely anxious.

"'Too much moon,' says Dave, 'an' then, ag'in, the whole Apache gang's below us in the draw, an' we'd never get by once in a thousand times. No,' goes on Dave, 'one shore thing—we can't back out nor crawl off. We has to play the hand now, plumb through.'

"Then Dave tells the towerist he an' I talks over the weddin' he goes into so inadvertent, an' if thar's a chance to save him from becomin' a father-in-law abrupt, we'll play it to win.

"'This yere is the only waggon track out,' says Dave to me, after we pow-wows an hour. 'You go down to these Injuns an' find the right one that away, an' tell him the squaw's got a buck now. Tell him he's barred. Which, at this p'int in your revelations, he's due to offer a fight, an' of course you takes him. Tell him at first drink time to-morow mornin' he finds me ready to fight for the squaw.'

"'But this business makes me tired,' says Dave, a heap disgusted. 'If these eediots had let them Injuns alone, or even if they disdains the ponies when they was brought up, this yere could be fixed easy. But now it's fight or give up the woman.'

"Of course thar ain't no use explainin' nuthin' to Injuns. You might as well waste time expoundin' of things to coyotes an' jack rabbits. All that's left for me to do is to trail out after my savage an' notify him that this weddin' he proposes is postponed, an' that all bets is off.

"I finds him easy enough, an' he's shore a haggard-lookin' Injun. He's as ugly as this female towerist he's after. I saw it off on him in Spanish how the game stacks up, an' he displays a mighty baleful spirit. Just as Tutt says he's out to shoot for the squaw; an' as thar's no tellin' away from it, I tells him to paint his'f for war, an' come a-runnin.'

"I has to carry a hard face; for we're shorely in for it. Yere we be four days from Wolfville, an' the Injuns—an' I reckon thar's twenty bucks in the outfit—is camped in between us an' help.

"This Apache who's after the woman is named Black Dog. The next mornin' Tutt saddles up an' rides off to one side of our camp, mebby it's a quarter of a mile, an' then gets off his pony an' stands thar. We don't onfold to the towerists the details of the play, not even to the Apache's father-in-law. The towerist female is that ignorant of what's goin' on, she's pesterin' 'round all unconscious, makin' bakin' powder biscuit at the time. I looks at her close, an' it strikes me some vigorous, it's a reckless savage who unites his life with hers. She's got a visage to which the aige of a tomahawk presents a frank and open look. But I don't get much time to be disgusted over this Black Dog's taste before he comes p'intin out from among his people.

"The sun's just gettin' over the hills to the east, an' as it strikes him he's shore a fashionable-lookin' Injun. He ain't got nuthin' on but a war bonnet an' a coat of red an' blue paint. The rest of his trousseau he confines to his Winchester an' a cartridge belt. He's on his war pony, an' the bronco's stripped as bare as this Black Dog is; not a strap from muzzle to tail. The Apache's tied his mane full of ribbons, an' throws a red blanket across his lap for general effect. Take it all over, he's a nifty-lookin' savage.

"So far as the dooel goes, Dave ain't runnin' no resk. He stands thar on the ground an' keeps his hoss between him an' this yere Black Dog. It's a play which forces the Apache's hand, too. He's due, bein' Injun, to go circlin' Dave, an' do his shootin' on the canter.

"An' that's what this weak-minded Injun dces. He breaks into a lope an' goes sailin' round Dave like a hawk. Durin' these exercises he lays over on the shoulder of his hoss an' bangs away from under his neck with one hand, permiscus.

"This is mere frivolity. Thar ain't no white man could shoot under such conditions; an' Injuns can't shoot, nohow. They don't savey a hind sight that away; an' holds 'way over.

"An', as I remarks, if Dave's hit any it's goin' to shorely be an accident, an' accidents don't happen none in Arizona; leastwise not with guns.

"Mebby this Black Dog's banged away towards Dave three times, when all at once, Dave who's been follerin' of him through the sights for thirty seconds, onhooks his rifle an' the deal comes to a full stop. Dave's shootin' a Sharp's, with 120 grains of powder, an' the way he sends a bullet, caliber 45, plumb through that war pony an' this yere Black Dog, who's hanging on it's off side don't bother him a bit. The pony an' the Black Dog goes over on their heads too dead to bury.

"Dave rides in an' brings the blankets an' war bonnet. Even the female towerist, which is the object of the meetin', don't seem informed none of the course of events. The fact is she never does acquire the rights of it all till we're two days back on the return trail.

"Thar's no more bother. Injuns is partic'lar people that way, about etiquette as they saveys it, an' followin' Dave's downin' this Black Dog they ain't makin' a moan nor a move. They takes in all plenty solem an' mute, an' goes to layin' out the Black Dog's obsequies without no more notice of us. It was a square deal; they sees that; an' they ain't filin' no objections. As for our end of the game, we moves out for Wolfville, makin' no idle delays whatever.

"Goin' in, Dave, after thinkin' some, suggests to me that it's likely to be a heap good story not to tell Annie.

"'Females is illogical, that away,' says Dave, 'an' I ain't goin' to have time to eddicate Annie to a proper view of this yere. So, I reckon, it's goin' to be a crafty play not to tell her.'

"The Britons has been gone two weeks, when Annie learns the story. These towerists was plumb tired of Arizona when we trails into Wolfville, an' don't seem to tarry a second, before they trails out for Tucson.

"'They just hits a high place or two,' says Jack Moore, after he hears of them designs of Black Dog, 'an' they'll be clean out of the country. I don't reckon none they comes back soon, neither.'

"But it's the towerist women that makes the trouble from start to finish. It's a letter from her which she writes back to Dave, allowin' she'll thank him some more, as her preserver, that brings the news to Annie. She gets this missive, an' she an' Mrs. Rucker—who does it all innocent—ups an' rifles an' reads it to each other a whole lot. It's then Annie allows Dave is breakin' her heart, an' prances home for her shaker and quits.

"The whole camp knows the story in an hour, an' sympathises with Dave. Of course, no one's blamin' Annie. She's a female, an' onresponsible for one thing; an' then ag'in Dave's a heap onlikely to stand condemnations of his wife.

"'She's as good a woman as ever wore a hole in a moccasin,' says Dave, while he's recoverin' of his spirits at the Red Light bar. An' we all allows she shorely is; an' then everybody looks pensive an' sincere that away, so's not to harrow Dave none, an' make his burden more.

"'But whatever can I do to fetch her back to camp?' says Dave, appealin' to Enright mighty wretched. 'I goes plumb locoed if yere keeps on.'

"'My notion is we all better puts Mrs. Rucker in to deal the game,' says Enright. 'Mrs. Rucker's a female, an' is shorely due to know what cards to draw. But this oughter be a lesson to you, Dave, not to go projectin' up to strange women no more.'

"'It's a forced play,' says Dave. 'Them Injuns has us treed. It's a case of fight or give up the woman, so what was I to do?'

"'Well,' says Enright, some severe, 'you might at least consult with this towerist woman some. But you don't. You simply gets a gun an' goes trackin' round in her destinies, an' shootin' up her prospects like you has a personal interest. You don't know but she deplores the deal complete. Peets an' me, an' Boggs, an' all the rest of us is your friends; an' nacherally partial on your side. We all thinks you means well. But after all what I says is this: It ain't no surprisin' thing when Annie a-hearin' of these pronounced attentions which you pays this towerist lady is filled with grief. This shootin' up an Apache because he's planning to wed this female some is what I shorely calls pronounced attentions. What do you think yourse'f, Peets?'

"'Why I readily believe what Dave says,' replies Peet. 'Ondoubtedly he acts for the best, as he sees it. But jest as you puts it the headlong way he goes after this yere Black Dog; settin' of the war jig the next sun up; an' all without even saying: "let me look at your hand" to this female, justifi's the inference that Dave feels like he's out to down a rival. Of course, I don't say an' I don't believe Dave thinks of this old maid once; but he sees hims'f he shore goes to war a heap precipitate an' onconsiderate; an' Annie has ondoubted grounds to buck.'

"'Which, when you all puts it so clear, I think so, too,' says Dave, a mighty sight dejected. 'But I ain't been wedded long—ain't more'n what you might call an amatoor husband. What you all oughter do now is h'ep to round her up. If Annie was a bunch of cattle, or a band of ponies, as had stampeded, you'd be in the saddle too quick.'

"Mrs. Rucker shore does all she knows to soften Annie. 'Dave's got a good heart,' says she.

"'That's nothing to do with his makin' love to the British woman,' says Annie, grittin' her teeth like she could eat the sights offen a six-shooter an' find relief tharby.

"'He never makes no love to this woman,' says Mrs. Rucker.

"'When he ketches her flirtin' with that Injun,' demands Annie, 'don't Dave shoot him up a lot? What do you all call makin' love? He never downs no Injuns for me, an' I'm his lawful wife!' An' yere Mrs. Rucker allows, when she reports to Enright an' Dave an' the rest of the outfit in the Red Light, she weeps as if her heart is shorely broke.

"'Which the poor girl's to be pitied,' says Enright. 'Dave,' he goes on, turnin' to him some fierce, 'you don't deserve no such devotion as this.'

"'That's whatever,' says Dan Boggs, lookin' truculent at Dave. 'This yere Annie's an angel.'

"So thar we be, up against it, an' not a man knows a thing to do to square the deal with Dave's wife. We calls for drinks all 'round an' sets about, an' thinks. At last Dave speaks up in a low-spirited way.

"'I reckon she jumps the game for good,' he says. 'But if she's goin' I wants her to have a layout. If you all cares to go over to the store, I allows I'll lose a blue stack or two, an' win out some duds. If she's goin' I wants her to quit the deal ahead.'

"So Dave sets out for the store, an' the rest of us sorter straggles along. Thar's nothin' gay about us. Dave gets a shawl an' a dress, nuthin' gaudy; just a plain red an' yaller. These he packs over to Annie by Mrs. Rucker, who's that wrapped up in the deal she forgets to rustle us our grub utterly.

"Well, it's the onexpected as happens in Wolfville, same as everywhere else. The minute Annie sees the raiment, an' realises how Dave loves her, that settles it. Her heart melts right thar. She ain't sayin' a word; jest ropes onto the dry goods an' starts sobbin' out for the doby, where she an' Dave lives.

"Dave, when he sees this, shakes hands all round, but don't trust hise'f with no remarks. Jest gives our paws a squeeze, like he knows he can rely on our friendship; an' hunts his way across to Annie without a word.

"'It's all right about bein' youthful an' light that away,' says Enright, after Dave pulls his freight, 'but Tutt oughter remember yereafter, before he goes mixin' with towerists an' Injuns, that he's a married man.'"

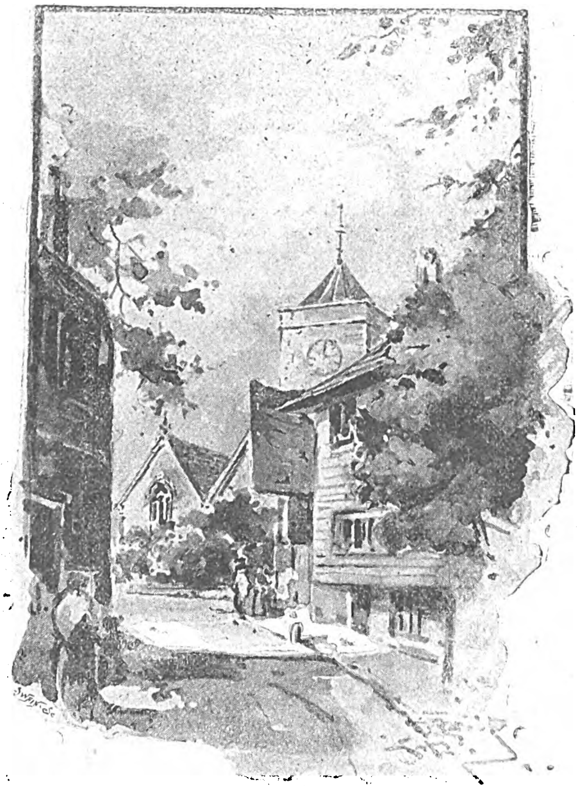
(*No. 2 of the series next week.*)

THE WITCH'S RING.

A VERY curious, straggling, sleepy old village is Adlington. Half a century behind the rest of the world, it still sits between the green hills, with its elbows on its knees and its chin in its hands, musing on bygone days, when dead and gone kings held the land under their sway, and when, as its old folk sagely remark, things were not as they are now. There are a great many old people in Adlington; in fact, very few die young there.

The atmosphere is so dreamy and peaceful that excitement cannot exist, and the wear and tear of the busy world is unknown, or, at most, only hums faintly over the hills, like the buzzing of a fly on a sunny pane on a summer day. And so they still sit in their chimney-corners from year to year, and muse, and doze, and dream, until they dream their lives away and take their final sleep. It was to an old crone of this description that I was indebted for my adventure.

In the course of my idle ramblings about the village, I chanced one day to peer over a crumbling wall and discovered an old, disused burial-ground. The brown slabs were broken, prostrate, and scattered, with only here and there a forlorn, unsteady stone standing wearily, and waiting for the time to come when it, too, might fall down and rest with the sleepers beneath.



The atmosphere is so dreamy and peaceful.

Scrambling over the low wall, I stooped about among the grass, pushing away the tangled masses of vines and leaves from the faces of slabs, that I might read the inscriptions there. But the suns and storms of over a hundred years had obliterated nearly all the letters, so that only portions of names and dates remained. Finally, down in a deep corner of the inclosure, where the weeds grew thickest and the shade was darkest, I found an old stone which, leaning forward, had protected its face from the storms, and on this stone I read the words:

BARBARA CONWAIL.
Born 1670, Died August 14th, 1730. Age 60 years.
Having been lawfully executed for the practice of witchcraft.

My curiosity was at once aroused. I inquired of several persons as to the history of this woman, but without success for a time. Finally, however, I found an old woman, who told me the following history of Barbara Conwail, as it had been handed down by her ancestors:

Living in an old stone house at the edge of the village, she was rarely seen—for no one ever crossed her threshold—save when she was occasionally met by a frightened party of children idling away a summer's afternoon holiday in the woods, when she would scowl and pass on, stooping down as she crossed the fields, gathering herbs with which to brew her mighty potions. No one ever interfered with her, however, until a sad year came to Adlington.

An epidemic broke out, and raged with a fury that nothing could withstand. People began to mutter that Barbara, the witch, was the cause of it. Passing along the road, she was stoned by a party of boys, to whom she turned, and, shaking her bony hand, shrieked that the curse was upon them.

Two of the lads sickened and died in a few days, and though scores were carried away in a like manner, an especial import was attached to their death. Barbara began to be watched. They looked through her windows at midnight and found her bending over a seething cauldron, throwing in herbs, muttering cabalistic words, and stirring the mixture with what they reported to be human bones. Old Barbara was working her charms.

So when one morning a man came into town, bruised and covered with mud, and testified that as he rode past old Barbara's house at twelve o'clock the night before he saw the Arch Fiend and the witch in conversation upon the house-top, surrounded by flames, and laughing fiendishly in the lurid glare as they shook their fists at the plague-stricken village sleeping below, his tale found ready credence.

The fact that he was an habitual drunkard, and had, on more than one occasion, rolled from his house in a drunken stupor and passed the night in a ditch, dreaming wild dreams, did not in the least detract from the belief of the simple villagers in his vivid account of this scene.

When he related how this pair of demons had pounced upon him, and had first tortured and then thrown him senseless into a ditch, their indignation became uncontrollable.

Old Barbara was tried, condemned, and hanged, though she protested in her innocence to the last. The little sum of money found in her possession was used to buy that grave-stone—as no one would dare appropriate it—and to this day, if anyone were bold enough to go to her grave at midnight on the same day of the year on which she was hanged, and say: “Barbara, I believe you were innocent,” at the same time stretching out his hand over the grave, she would appear to him and place in his hand a talisman.

This talisman would bring good fortune as long as he retained it, but at some time in his life the witch would return to him and claim her own.

The old woman ended her story in a low, impressive monotone, which, with her earnestness and sincere belief in what she said, almost carried conviction to me in spite of reason. As I sauntered away, ridiculing these ignorant and superstitious village folk, I found myself, almost unconsciously, wandering back through the old burial ground to the witch's grave.

Carelessly glancing at the inscription I was surprised to find that upon that very day was the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of her death, and still more surprised when the thought occurred to me of watching at her grave that night. I ridiculed and scoffed the idea. Where was my boasted common sense and incredulity? But still, returning ever, came that wayward thing called fancy—and it conquered.

The world was wild and weird that night when I stole forth from the village. The wind was moaning through the trees and sobbing piteously; the black clouds were driven in broken patches across the sky, now letting down the moonshine, and again shrouding all in blackest night, and making the shadows chase each other about and steal round corners upon one in a manner that made me wince in spite of myself.

Climbing the low stone wall—rather nervously, I confess—I stole away through the old, down-trodden graves, pushing through the weeds and briars as silently as possible, and making my way towards that dark, dreary corner where the old witch reposed. A graveyard at noon is a very different spot from a graveyard at midnight, especially if one is there to seek an interview with a spirit.

I reached the place and stood by the tomb. It still lacked a few minutes of twelve, and as I stood there watching the moonlight flitting over the graves, I longed for a little ray to creep in with me. But no—approaching and receding and wavering all about me, it never touched this grave, but fled away as often as it approached, as though frightened at the black shadow for ever lurking there.

By-and-bye the village clock tolled twelve. As the slow, tremulous tones stole out on the night, the wind ceased moaning, the clouds covered the face of the moon, the insects stopped chirping, and when the last stroke was finished, the almost unbearable silence was broken only by my own breathing, which I strove in vain to suppress. The darkness was intense and I could see nothing. A terrible feeling of guilt and terror seized me, that I, a mortal, should be intruding there at such an hour. Mechanically I strove to speak the words I had been told, but my lips refused to form a sound.

Still I stood in that awful black silence, chilled with fear, until with a mighty effort I reached out my arm over the grave, and grasped—a hand.

It was only for an instant—not that, for it was jerked away in a twinkling—but long enough to feel how warm and velvety it was, and how small. Not that I lingered there to reflect upon these novel qualities in the hand of a ghost—and an old witch at that—for you altogether mistake my bravery in supposing it; but it was after I had cleared the old wall at a bound and was out on the moonlight road, walking at a rattling good pace away from the place, that I recalled it.

From a state of intense cold, I had changed to burning heat. The touch of those soft fingers thrilled me through as with an electric shock, and I walked faster still in my excitement.

Gradually the consciousness forced itself upon me that I held something in one of my clenched hands. There was first a glitter and then a sparkle, as the moonlight fell into the hollow of my upraised hand, and I saw there a glittering ring, set with flashing stones. The icicles began slipping down by back again, and I hurried on.

Some persons may be inclined to deride my nervousness on this occasion, but I assure such that I am not naturally a timid man. I have a medal hanging in my room at home which asserts that I am not a timid man, and, above all, I had always been particularly devoid of superstitious fear; but truth compels me to say that I not only lighted all the lights on reaching my room at the little inn that night, but turned them very high into the bargain, and that I made a systematic inspection of all the cupboards, and removed from its peg a long cloak that was hanging in a very suggestive position on the wall. This done, I sat down—with my back against the wall—and examined the ring.

It was a quaint old ring, curiously carved and massive. The setting was composed of several small coloured stones set in a circle about a large diamond. My financial circumstances had rendered it unnecessary for me to acquaint myself with precious stones and their values, so that I could only surmise that the ring was somewhat valuable. Considering the excited condition of my nerves by this time, it was not strange that I should start when my eye fell upon the name that was inscribed in quaint letters inside the ring—“Barbara.”

I sat and mused upon the whole adventure; what the crone had told me—the graveyard, the ring, and (this thought returned to me the oftenest) the thrilling touch of that soft hand in the darkness.

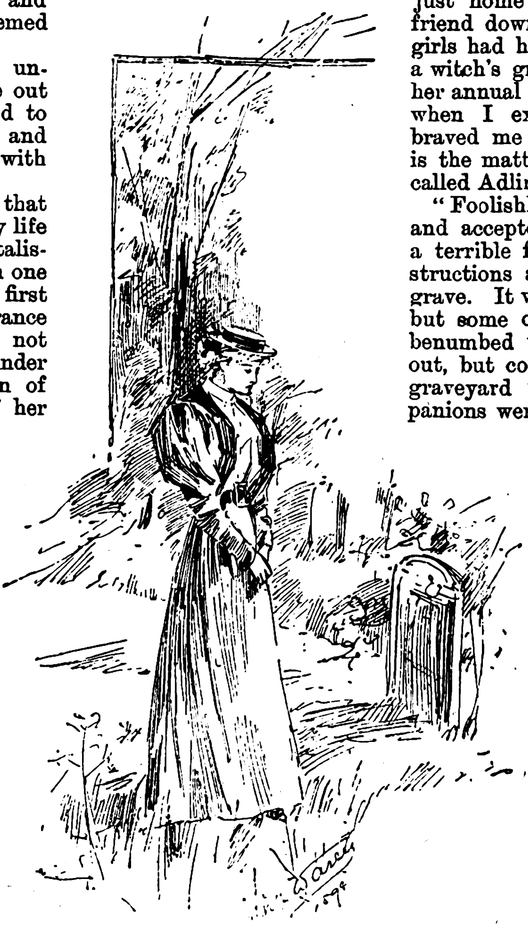
Perhaps I should say here that I called myself an old bachelor, and had never been in love—that is, with any mortal. I did not think that I was devoid of sentiment or feeling, for I often dreamt of love, and worshipped beautiful things of my own fancy; but my life had been thrown among boys and men, and woman was far away and a mystery. A motherless home, a stern father, a hardworking student's life at college, a stranger struggling for bread and reputation in a great city—one can perceive how it could be that I had made few acquaintances among women. In reality I was only twenty-five, but much experience and a busy life had made me feel older; so, as I said, I called myself a bachelor.

I have given this brief history of myself in order to prepare the way for another confession. I was falling in love with the owner of that soft, warm hand. It was preposterous, but it was true. I began to doubt my reason. In vain I tried to remember that Barbara, the witch, was an old, ugly woman. The only picture I could call up was that of a beautiful young girl with—but words fail me; only she was far from ghastly, but was as warm and substantial and full of life as that hand had seemed to be.

The fire-irons fell with an unearthly clatter, and startled me out of my dreams. I went to bed to soothe my nerves with sleep, and lay awake most of the night with the lamps burning.

Fortune smiled upon me from that night. Two years of busy city life had passed, and old Barbara's talisman was still unreclaimed, when one day—do you believe in love at first sight? Well, if the first appearance of Walter Wyman's sister had not conquered me, as she stood under the parlour lamps, a revelation of beauty and youth, the touch of her hand when she welcomed her brother's friend would have enslaved me for ever. Never had a touch so thrilled me since—since I had held the witch's hand in the graveyard. The same peculiar shock passed through me, and the memory of that spectral night came over me like a flash.

But I did not start out to tell a love story. Let me briefly say that I fell in love, hopelessly and ridiculously in love, and that I acted just like all lovers have done since the world began. It doesn't matter much about a man's age. At twenty-seven he will conduct himself pretty much as he would have done at seventeen, and so I wrote verses, and sighed, and tormented myself with a thousand hopes and fears, and grew hot and cold by turns, and wonderfully timid, and prided myself upon concealing it all, when, as a matter of fact, the state of my feelings was perfectly apparent to all my acquaintances.



Foolishly I went to look at the grave.

Matters were in this interesting state, when one day an opportunity occurred of which I availed myself with a degree of skill and presence of mind that I am proud of to this day. It all came about through my asking the young lady if she believed in ghosts.

"I suppose I should," said she, laughing, "considering my experience."

Of course, I implored an explanation, and she related to me the following story:

"It was about two years ago when a party of girls, just home from school, were visiting a friend down in the country. One of the girls had heard a foolish old story about a witch's grave, and some nonsense about her annual appearance, and a talisman, and when I expressed my incredulity they braved me to put it to the test. What is the matter? The place? A little town called Adlington.

"Foolishly I went to look at the grave, and accepted their challenge, and received a terrible fright. I carried out their instructions and stretched my arm over the grave. It was so dark I could see nothing, but some one seized my hand. I was so benumbed with fear that I could not cry out, but could only fly through the lonely graveyard to where my trembling companions were awaiting me in the field. It was a foolish adventure, for I fell ill, and it cost me a valuable ring, which was left to me by poor Aunt Barbara. 'For her little namesake,' she said, when she sent it across the sea to me. You see, the ring was a little large for my finger, and was pulled off by—by——"

"By me," I interrupted, taking the lost ring from my pocket.

It was time for Barbara (I forgot to say that was her name) to be startled now. I hope I may say that I came out strong on that occasion. I told my story in a very impressive way; lingered over the effect of the witch's hand on my heart; spoke of the good fortune the talisman had brought me; made a very pretty allusion to Barbara the witch reclaiming her own—for was she not a witch, after all, as I could testify, having felt her charms?—and, finally, not only offered to return the ring, but to give myself into the bargain.

She took both.

Paul Roper.

Mother and Daughter.

THE lady was evidently in a hurry, or surely she would have waited a little longer to see the result of the accident—an accident caused by the reckless driving of her own coachman. She was seated in a very smart-looking victoria; and turning a corner near the park her horses had knocked over an old woman. A crowd collected instantly, but the lady instead of alighting merely called a policeman to her and asked if the woman was killed.

No, she was not killed, certainly, but she was dazed and flustered and seemed to have a difficulty in breathing. Only a difficulty in breathing. Of course the lady was not responsible for such a very common complaint as that. It might not even be the result of the accident. Perhaps the poor soul always had a difficulty in breathing.

At any rate the concert to which the lady was hurrying would assuredly not be postponed, and a guinea ticket could not be wasted for so slight a cause. Suppose the old woman's breathing should become more difficult; supposing, in fact, it should cease—would she, the lady, be wanted?

The policeman told her in the event of an inquest her coachman would most certainly be called.

"Very well, here is my address," and she drew out a very elaborate, gold-mounted card-case. "Where will they take the poor creature? To St. George's Hospital? I will call to-morrow and inquire after her. In the meantime there may be things she will want. Give this sovereign to the authorities and ask them to look after her."

And then the lady spoke a word to her coachman and drove away, leaving her character behind her.

They were not very hard on her, after all. Was she not handsome, and richly dressed, and prosperous-looking? The coachman was driving a little carelessly. Yes; but was that his mistress's fault? How was she to know he was endangering the lives of passers-by, and undoubtedly the old woman had been staring about her in a helpless sort of way. Nay, had she not been regarding the occupant of this very carriage as it dashed forward, careless whether or not she stood dangerously near the horses? And the park on a bright, sunny afternoon was meant for just such brilliant equipages and handsome ladies; and poor, dazed old bodies should not wander about with no one to look after them. So the crowd, though composed mainly of humble folk, was not very hard on the pretty lady, for all she tossed a sovereign so carelessly and drove away so fast.

Meanwhile the poor creature who had had the misfortune to stand in the way of the high-stepping cobs was being borne tenderly enough to the nearest hospital. A woman not more than sixty years of age, although all those about her spoke of her as old. But then her hair was scanty and quite white, and her face was deeply furrowed, and, more than all, she had that look of helplessness which belongs either to the very old or the very young.

A cab had been called, and strong arms had lifted her in and supported her tenderly on the way.

"You're bearing it bravely, mother," said a rough man who had volunteered his services.

She turned her pale, dim eyes upon him.

"Don't call me that," she said, "I have no child."

"Head a little queer," thought the man.

But when a little later she was comfortably resting in one of the hospital beds she talked rationally enough, and was gently grateful for all the care that was taken of her.

"No, I don't feel no pain," she said in answer to an inquiry of the nurse. "What did the doctor say?"

"He said the spine was injured."

"Ha! that means my back's broke; I thought as much. Well, my heart was broke fifteen years ago. Folk can't live fifteen years with a broken back, can they? I'm glad of that."

"Have you no one belonging to you?" asked the nurse; "no one who ought to be told of your condition?"

"Not a soul, dearie, not a soul. My old man died six years ago come Christmas. His heart was broke too. He lived nine years, but he died of it at last. Mine's tougher, mayhap, for it wasn't the grief after all that killed me, but the beautiful lady's horses. No, there's no one to care about me, no one in all the wide world."

Notwithstanding this assertion the next day some one did inquire for her, and came up the long bare room, and sat down by the poor creature's bed. A lady dressed in silks and velvets—showily, brightly dressed; with gold ornaments flaunting in the sunshine, and a combination of colours and material which good taste would have avoided.

But to the invalid all this brilliancy and richness was pleasing. She put out her hand and stroked the feathers and laces; and the caress seemed to surprise and touch their wearer. She had regarded this visit to the hospital as a dreadful penance inflicted on her by her coachman's negligence, and had undertaken it in no contrite or gentle spirit. She had expected reproaches, lamentations, tears—anything but the gentle goodwill she was met with. Almost to her own surprise she bent down and said:

"I am sorry for your accident. So sorry that I was the cause of it."

"No need to be, dearie," was the answer. "I ain't sorry. And as it had to happen 'twas better it should ha' happened to me. Not but what you had ought to be more careful, for you might ha' knocked down and killed some one whose life was dear to 'em. 'Tain't quite right, the way you grand folk has."

Grand! Her listener's lips framed the word as if in surprise, but gave it no utterance.

"Not that I suppose you ses to your coachman: 'Drive over the old woman; it don't matter,' but you acts all your lives as if old women didn't matter."

She was lying back peacefully on her pillow, maundering on in a quiet way, stopping now and then as weakness with giant strides gained upon her.

"Are you in pain?" asked the lady.

"No, dearie, and the doctor says I shan't be no more. All the pain's over. I remember seeing your face just as you come dashing by yesterday. I was walking along thinking of my girl—my girl."

Her restless fingers clutched at the coverlet, and the worn face was distorted with emotion.

"What of her?" asked the lady, putting her gloved hand on the bony, withered one near her. "Why were you thinking particularly of her yesterday?"

"I warn't; I'm allus thinking of her—allus, allus. If I sees a bright face or a pretty gownd I says to myself: 'That's how my girl might have looked.' And then it all comes over me fresh as if it just happened."

"Tell me about her. How did you lose her?"

"I didn't lose her. She left me of her own free will. Left her mother and father and her happy home because, I suppose, we weren't good enough for the likes of her. Left us for a man she'd known a couple of months. For eighteen year she'd been the light of our eyes; and he I don't suppose cared for her as many weeks—threw her off, mayhap, for some newer face; and serve her right, serve her right."

It was wonderful and horrible to see the energy which she seemed to gather up in remembering her wrongs. All the peaceful weakness of approaching death had fled, and she trembled with eagerness to tell her tale.

"Do not be so harsh," said the lady. "You should be at peace with every one now. You should forgive her."

"Never. My old man was the only thing dearer to me than her in the world, and she killed him. He died by inches through nine long years, pining to see his little girl. When he lay a-dying he spoke of her and forgave her, but I never will."

"Perhaps she was not so much to blame. Perhaps the fault was more her lover's than hers; and—and—she may have loved him."

"And hadn't we loved her? Hadn't we bin good to her? Why shouldn't she ha' trusted our sense and experience? What had we lived for and thought of but her? What was we working and saving money for but to get her a good husband? When the young fellow we'd fixed on up and spoke to her, and she give him a saucy answer, did we worrit and torment the girl? 'No,' we says, 'she's young and shy, and don't look to be married yet, let her bide.' And we did let her bide. I wish we'd forced her to take the man whether she'd wanted or not. Mayhap she'd a bin a honest woman now."

"Tell me something more of her, of yourself," said the lady. "Did you always live in London?"

"No, dearie; we lived in the country when we had the child. But we left becos we were ashamed to meet our neighbours, knowing what they knew of her. So we gave up our home and our little business and come to London, and lived just from hand to mouth. It didn't seem no good to work any more. We'd put by enough for the two buryin's—my old man's and mine."

"Would you like to be buried in the country, with trees waving and pretty flowers blooming above you?"

"No, no, dearie. Beside my old man—beside my old man. The child'll never lie near us; but us two'll be together. Perhaps she's at the bottom of some river. It's what the likes of her often comes to, arsting your pardon for mentioning such things. Such a pretty baby as she was—such a dear, sweet, happy little soul. We called her Daisy——"

The lady stopped suddenly, and a bracelet with which she had been playing clattered to the ground. It was a broad gold band, with the name "Marguerite" blazoned on it in diamonds.

"Be you going, ma'am?" asked the old woman, as her visitor rose. "You've been very kind to stay with me so long. Will you tell me your name?"

Her name! Which of all the names given her in love, in scorn, in mockery, could she tell the dying woman?

Suddenly she knelt by the bed.

"Think of me as—as Daisy," she said. "Think of me as if I were your own girl come to soothe your dying moments. Do I—do I remind you at all of her?"

"No, dearie; she was much younger, and her hair was dark. Yours is bright, like sunshine."

"But if I should ever meet her—such strange things happen—may I say you forgave her?"

"Say her father forgave her. She broke his heart, but he forgave her."

"But you, her mother, oh! you would not be so cruel as to die without one word of forgiveness for her? You have forgiven me, a stranger, for being the cause of your death, surely you would not be less tender to your own child? Suppose she came to you now, a sinner, but repentant, prosperous and happy to all appearance, but in reality, sorrowing, oh! so bitterly, for the past——"

"I should curse——"

"No, no!" shrieked Marguerite, "don't say the word. What if since she left you she had no one to guide, to befriend her? What if the man she believed in turned traitor and left her penniless in the world? What if she had thought of her happy home when it was too late? What if she feared you, her mother, too much to seek you again? Wouldn't you at least remember that her father had forgiven her, and tell her what he said of her when he was dying?"

The old woman's jaw had dropped. In that last spasm of righteous anger, death had made a terrible forward spring. The end was very near now. Her voice was faint and husky, and tearless sobs shook her whole frame as she spoke.

"He said: 'My poor little girl, my poor little girl, may God forgive her and take her in His arms once more!'"

There was silence for a moment. Marguerite gathered the feeble head to her breast, and with a white face but dry eyes wiped the damp brow and pressed her lips to it.

"I feel better, dearie," said the old woman at last. "I am going to see my old man."

"Don't go without a word of forgiveness," pleaded the lady passionately. "How will you bear to meet him and say with your dying breath you cursed your child? Think when her time comes there'll be no loving husband waiting for her. She may not have a friend beside her to smooth her pillow. Oh, don't, don't die without a word."

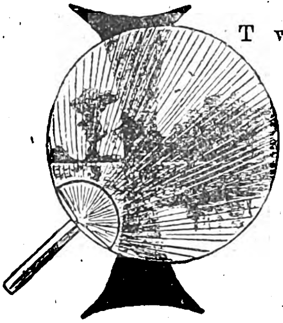
The faint breath came fainter and fainter. A visible change stole over the grey face. Twice she tried to speak. It was a struggle against death. For a moment she lay so still the lady thought the end had come. Then the dim eyes opened once more, and, with a last desperate effort came the words:

"My poor little girl! May God—forgive—take her—in His arms——"

R. Henry.

* * *

What the Camera Revealed.



IT was just after Christmas last year when the inhabitants of a small village down in Cornwall were thrown into a state of intense curiosity by the unnatural appearance and strange behaviour of a young gentleman who had come to live amongst them.

Although by his form and face he could not have been much over twenty, his hair was as white as snow!

He kept but one servant, who managed everything, and to her he seldom spoke. He was studying to enter the Church, and that was the sum and difference of all that could be ascertained about him.

One day a gentleman—who it was afterwards known was a near relative of the strange man, and had come all the way from the East Indies to search for him—called.

He was struck dumb at the alteration of this young fellow—who was really his deceased sister's husband—and, in spite of his being a disbeliever in everything approaching the supernatural, he was compelled to accept as facts the following startling events, or to doubt the evidence of his senses.

* * * * *

"You ask why, at the age of twenty-four, my hair is white? Why I have given up the profession I loved to become a priest of the church? You, her brother, understand how dearly I loved her, so I will tell you, although a word about it has never before passed my lips.

"But first let me ask you, have you ever studied the subject known as hypnotism? No? Then in all the days of your life to come never begin to. Shun the very thought of it as you would the most deadly poison, for a knowledge of it would arm you with a power that no human being should possess.

"But something born within me led me to grow up fascinated with this mysterious science, and every spare hour was devoted to it, till by my own methods, and my own discoveries, I could cast a subtle spell for good or evil on all those who came in familiar contact with me.

"Dear Emmie witnessed many of my experiments, and got as much interested in it as I was, and often begged me to hypnotise her. This I always refused to do with a firm resolve in my own mind that I never would.

"But last Christmas—we had been married only a month, you know—we stood in the dusk of the evening gazing at the falling snow, and the dead white view all round us. The servants had gone to their own homes; we were alone in our comfortable room. Suddenly she drew the blinds, and turning to me, exclaimed with delight:

"'Harry, I will tell you how we will spend this evening. You shall hypnotise me.'

"In vain I protested. She grasped my hands, and looked into my eyes. The full glare of the Christmas log fell on her lovely face, and magnified her bewitching beauty, and I was as helpless to refuse the request which came with the love that streamed from her eyes as the most subdued subject ever under my influence had been able to resist my command.

"Playfully I pressed her back into a chair, seated myself in front of her, and, holding her hands in mine, gazed into the eyes that still sparkled with fun.

"Gradually the signs I knew so well passed in succession over my darling's face; finally came the long deep sigh and the eyes closed in profound sleep.

"Then I began the mystic passes, and a fresh wave of wondrous beauty broke over her fair young face each time my quivering hands passed from the crown of glossy hair to the tips of her tapered fingers, till I stood in awe at the picture of spiritual loveliness I had been instrumental in creating.

"But the passion for experiment was on me. I excited the organ phrenologists call 'tune,' and she sang in a voice and with a charm no words could describe.

"I excited the organ of 'veneration.' She fell on her knees in an attitude of deep devotion, and clasped her hands in prayer.

"Presently her position changed. Her face assumed a different expression.

"I was fascinated and rooted to the spot.

"It was the living, breathing image of the Madonna!

"A new thought struck me. I would photograph her.

"It was but the work of a minute to switch on the electric lamp and adjust the camera already prepared for a different purpose.

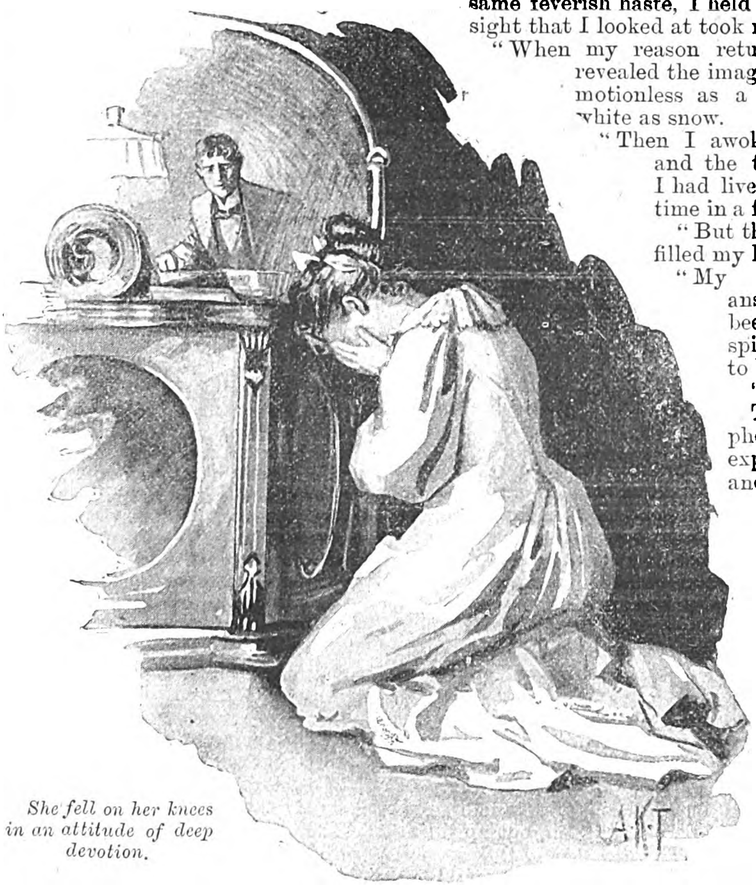
"To myself I counted 'One, two,' and the photograph was taken.

"I looked towards my wife. Oh, Heaven! what did I see? The glow of life that shone on her face was fading, as the light from a waning lamp.

"The next instant my arms were thrown round her, but she fell back heavily on the cushion I managed to push beneath her.

"'Emmie! Emmie, dearest, wake up!' I called; but there came no response, and my own voice sounded strange and far away.

"There was no throb to her pulse! There was no sign of breathing on the glass I held before her!



She fell on her knees in an attitude of deep devotion.

"I tried to part the hands that were still clasped as in prayer; but they were held like a vice, and fast growing cold!

"Again the glare from the Christmas log lit up the room, but this time it fell on the face, white and lifeless, as though chiselled from marble.

"Oh, the agony of those minutes! She was dead! And all the happiness and hopes of my life had fled for ever.

"I fell on my knees beside her, and there, alone with death, I prayed, in my utter despair, with a faith I had never possessed before.

"I prayed that, as in the days of old, a miracle might be performed, that life might be restored to her, for I could not live without her.

"And with my hand holding her silken tresses, in my irrational anguish hoping my prayer would be granted, I actually watched, expecting to see the brightness come back to her eyes, and the life-blood tint her cheeks.

"Suddenly a strange sensation of fortitude came over me. I realised that she was dead, and I gave the last fond kiss on the cold lips and brow.

"I no longer felt alone. As though urged by some unseen presence, I rose to my feet, walked straight over to the camera, took it to the adjoining laboratory, and began to complete the picture I had a feverish longing to look at.

"So real was the impression that some one stood near me, that I could feel, in my fancy, a warm breath on my face.

"And there, in the silent laboratory, on that night of all nights, I mechanically worked on, as though my actions and thoughts were controlled by some outward intelligence.

"Presently the negative was finished, and, with the same feverish haste, I held it up to view; but the sight that I looked at took my senses away.

"When my reason returned a looking-glass revealed the image of myself, standing motionless as a statue, with hair as white as snow.

"Then I awoke as from a dream, and the truth dawned on me. I had lived the agony of a lifetime in a few short hours.

"But the picture in my hand filled my heart with joy.

"My prayer had been answered—a miracle had been wrought. Her spirit had risen, always to be with me.

"Look!"

The brother took the photograph, and his face expressed wonder, awe, and bewilderment, as he looked.

It was a clear and positive photograph of two figures—one in a kneeling posture, and the other as if in the act of rising from behind her.

As you looked at them the effect was most singular.

It could only be roughly described as a woman kneeling with her back to a looking-glass, and as you looked at her, the reflection of her image would appear rising behind her.

Both were clearly and distinctly brought out. The face of the former expressed infinite sorrow, and that of the latter rapturous joy.

"Either it is a miracle," he said, as he handed the picture back, "or science is about to pierce the veil which has so long divided the natural from the supernatural."

R. H. Mathers.

The Wrong Number

A Neapolitan Tragedy

As a rule, men keep their madness to themselves. I will be an exception. My instincts are those of a confirmed gambler. I believe in one god, the god of chance, and in luck, his prophet. Hitherto my offerings and sacrifices have been insufficient to appease him, and he has treated me with marked malevolence, but I feel sure that the solution of his mystery lies in the square and its two diagonals, with payments of which figure we number our dwelling-houses, page our books, and count our wealth to-day—only I cannot discover it.

And I am convinced that the life of every one of us is bound up in one numerical term, and that the successful man is he, and he only, to whom the god of chance has vouchsafed, with his knowledge or without his knowledge, the figures of his number, and who, consciously or unconsciously, regulates his life by the powers of it—but I have sought for mine in vain.

Not long ago I conceived the idea, wherefore or wherefrom I cannot tell, that my number was thirty-two, and in every circumstance of life into which figures could be introduced I made it my fetish, but up till now it has only proved my bane.

I bought No. 32 in lotteries, but never won; I only dealt with tradesmen who lived at No. 32 in their streets, but reaped no advantage; I turned to page 32 in all the new books, but found no Bath Kol; I sought for a girl whose initials were C.B., the third and second letters of the alphabet, forced myself to fall in love with her, but she married a man whose figures were invested; I tried to discover the cipher of my life by taking every thirty-second letter in Shakespeare's plays. I bought thirty-two editions, from the first folio to the edition of Bowdler, and by counting, now in one, now in another, and by modifying the spelling, I connected a string of words in which must lie concealed the cryptogram of my destiny. But I had no Daniel to interpret it. My philosopher's stone wouldn't turn even into bread. I was growing poorer, insaner every day.

I determined to travel, realised all the property I could, and started for Europe with £4,000. My objective point was Naples. On arriving there I drove straight to the Grand Hotel, and asked at the office if I could have room, No. 32. The clerk stared, and said it was a sitting-room and engaged. Could I have No. 64? No, that was also engaged. No. 128? That was vacant, but very high up; but he could give me a much better room lower down, but I could have that if specially desired.

I took it. I unpacked, changed, and found my allotted place at the *table d'hôte*. On my right sat one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen. Her large, dark eyes, when she turned to scrutinise me as a new-comer, seemed to question my soul and demand a sympathetic reply. She was a splendid woman, sitting upright half a head taller than the rest of us. A model for a sculptor, not a painter. Her wonderfully fitting dress, a dead pearl grey. Her only ornament, a large ruby forming the head of a gold serpent twisted four times round her wrist.

She began conversing in French with a dapper little man opposite, then in Italian with his Umberto-typed neighbour, then in German with the man on her right, with a head all money-making squareness at the back, of philosophical spectacles and beard in front. Presently she turned and asked me for the salt in English. The ice was broken. We conversed during the rest of dinner on a variety of topics, travel, destiny, men and books, Naples and Warsaw, where I found she lived.

Afterwards we sat together among the oleanders in the square, cool, marble-paved hall over our coffee, listening to the band. Even "O bella Napoli" seemed to become fresh and new under the spell of her society, and the richness of her conversation fascinated me. As she rose at ten to say good-night, she held out her hand, and as I detained it a moment, the snake bracelet slipped round as if alive.

"Will you come to me for afternoon tea to-morrow at, say, half-past four? My salon is No. 32."

I accepted with pleasure and then went out and leant on the balcony outside the smoking-room looking over the sea. No. 32! At last my number is going to turn up, I thought. How lovely the night is when a new love has risen to illumine it.

For a long time I stood there watching the red zig-zag of lava on the cone of Vesuvius. Suddenly the wind changed and swept the smoke between it and the moon, and the red became like unto the red of a ruby.

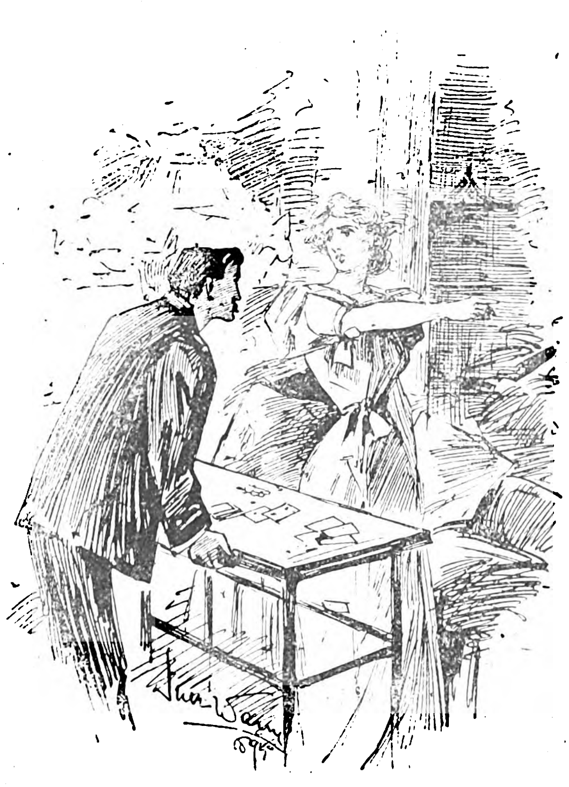
* * * * * * *

Madame did not appear at dinner, but I shall see her again later. I have been to tea. She has contrived with a woman's subtle skill to convert the bare hotel salon No. 32 into a veritable boudoir. A few draperies, piles of books and flowers, flowers everywhere, have changed it, as if by magic. When I was shown in she was lying on a long couch, and beckoned me to take a low armchair arranged at its side, with the tea-table in front of it.

As I sat there looking up at her, and drinking in her beauty while she talked rapidly of what she had seen and done and thought, I determined she was not only the most beautiful but the cleverest woman I had ever met.

I was beginning to give my heart to her in earnest, when the subject of cards suddenly came up. Did I play *écarté?* *What!* a game that requires thirty-two cards, my number? I wish she would stake herself; I could play my life, my soul against it, and be sure of winning now. Would I like a game? I should be delighted. She showed me where to find the cards, and we began. She suggested rather high stakes, but I did not care. I was elated. Her play was very good, and the fates were still against me.

I lost, but I felt that the turning-point in my life had come. When I rose to go as the dressing-gong sounded, she said, with her large eyes full on mine: "I am sorry you have been unlucky. If you will come up after dinner, say, at nine, you will have your revenge."



"Sir! leave my room!"

* * * *

I am writing this in bed. There is a sister, with big white wings on her head, looking after me. You will wonder why. Why? Why is it? I forget. Oh, yes, I know. I told her I must send a few lines to a friend. I mean I told the sister. She let me write, and promised—if anything happens—to send them to you at once. Where was I? Why do they put hot bandages on my head—red hot, I tell you—the marble was so cold. The marble? That's it, the marble.

I remember. I went to play *écarté* with Madame after dinner last night. It's coming back to me clearer, quite clear now. I took all the money I had with me, fascinated, enchanted; it was to be my lucky day. As she sat opposite me with that large ruby still about her wrist, my whole soul went out to her.

I watched every flash of the jewel, every subtle swing of her waist as she dealt or picked up her cards, but I feared her eyes, I wanted to keep cool. We played and played, and I kept on losing till I had lost all. Then I looked up and met her gaze, which held me with the potency of unsatisfied thirst.

"Still unlucky, poor little man," she said, and looking at the ivory tablets at her side, added: "I see I have won £2,000, which you have paid; you are honourable I like you. Take another chance. I will play you one game double or quits."

I looked at my notes. It would be the thirty-second game. That decided me.

"One moment," I whispered feverishly. "Will you be more generous, and if I win will you be my wife?"

Her eyes seemed to envelop me as she held out her hand to meet my grasp, and said slowly:

"I will."

We cut, played; the game was three all. I seemed fascinated by the ruby on her wrist. It was her deal. My eyes were following the stone, and—I swear it—I saw her pass the king. I was now as if in a dream. Of course, she turned it up and won the odd trick. I was ruined, and I had lost her. Suddenly my love, my fascination turned into hate, which forgot itself. I jumped up and, standing swaying with both hands leaning on the table, whispered hoarsely across it:

"Cheat!"

She rose to her full height. I can see her now, and I can hear her voice saying:

"Sir! leave my room!"

I staggered out backwards as if from the presence of a horror that was royal. Nurse, ice, ice; my head is on fire. I leant over the balustrade, as I had leaned over the balcony last night, looking into the square hall, lit only at this late hour by the full moon. Between the oleanders where she had sat last night, the marble looked so cool, and behind the white-curtained windows, in the white walls there was sleep.

Could I sleep? I love marble. Nurse, more ice. I have nearly done. I heard a step; heard quick breathing behind me; felt a strong push. I was falling. I saw but one thing in the moonlight—the red flash of a ruby; the rest was white, the marble was white. Do men sleep on marble—or under it? Nurse, nurse, this is the last hand; give me another card. Ha! it is. I mark the king, the king, the king of Terr——.

E. C. Waggener.

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THE QUEEN of NIGHT

By HEADON HILL,

(Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," "The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.)

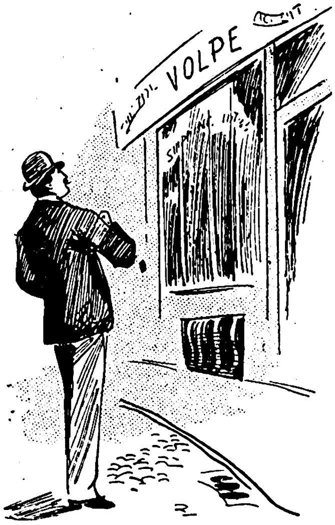
CHAPTER XVI.

THE MESSENGER FROM LEGHORN.

IT was the morning of my second day in Naples, and no news had reached me of Kennard, or of the man from whose dagger his meteor-like dash through the railway carriage at Pisa had saved me. I had put up at the Hotel Victoria on the Parthenope Quay, whence I could watch the blue waters of the beautiful Gulf for the coming of the *Queen of Night*, and all through the day after my arrival I had been thrown into a fever every time the smoke of an incoming steamer appeared on the horizon. But I was doomed to disappointment; none of the vessels seeking harbour proved to be the graceful craft which the detective had called a "murder-trap."

My impatience was becoming almost unbearable. Not only did I chafe against the delay in the arrival of the ship, but I feared from Kennard's absence that some harm had befallen him, and that unaided I should never be able to cope with the difficulties that beset me. Acting on the advice he had given I had abandoned disguise and resumed my own garment before engaging a room at the hotel, and I was beginning to consider whether my best course would not be to confide my position and anxiety to the English Consul, in the hope that he would be more helpful than his colleague at Genoa. Once I put on my hat to go to the Consulate, but the thought of the stone cell at the Convent of Santa Lucia overcame me, and I turned again to vainly scanning the sky-line beyond the Bay.

In the ordinary course the *Queen of Night* should have arrived at Naples early on the previous day, and as the weather was fine and calm the delay was quite inexplicable. It was now eleven o'clock in the forenoon, so that she was nearly thirty hours overdue, which, unless something had happened, was out of all proportion to any legitimate detention in so short a voyage. To my other anxieties began to be added wild thoughts of collisions, fires, shipwrecks, and a hundred other perils of the deep.



I walked up to the outer office.

At last I reached such a pitch that to stay kicking my heels about the hotel and staring out to sea was no longer possible to me. I decided to go down to the quays and endeavour to find someone who could aid my inquiries by interpreting for me, and, glad to be up and doing anything, I sallied forth at once. Passing through the Via Gioja I chanced to notice a name over a doorway which filled me with a sudden inspiration—the name of the agent whom Nathan had mentioned as his correspondent in Naples, one Signor Girolamo Volpe. If anyone in the city was likely to be able to give news of the ship this was the man, and at all risks I determined to try him.

I say all risks because there was every probability that if he knew who I was he would serve my enemies rather than myself by taking steps to curtail my liberty. Vizard, if still a free agent, having seen me on my way south, would have been certain to apprise their correspondent of the fact with instructions to throw obstacles in my way—if nothing worse—and it would not therefore be safe to make inquiry in my own name and person. As I was still wearing the mercantile uniform in which I had gone ashore at Genoa, I went first to a clothier's and bought a ready-made tourist suit, changing into it, by permission of the proprietor, in a room behind the shop. Then, having given instructions for my uniform to be sent to the hotel, I returned immediately to the Via Gioja.

The offices of Mr. Girolamo Volpe, though in a large and handsome building, were not themselves on a lordly scale, consisting, so far as I was able to judge during my brief acquaintance with them, of a couple of rooms on the ground floor just inside the main entrance. Assuming a confident air, I walked up to the outer office and found it a poky little place, with an ink-splashed counter inside running from wall to wall. A middle-aged, seedy-looking Italian clerk was writing at a desk behind the counter, and standing near was a portable Japanese screen between five and six feet high.

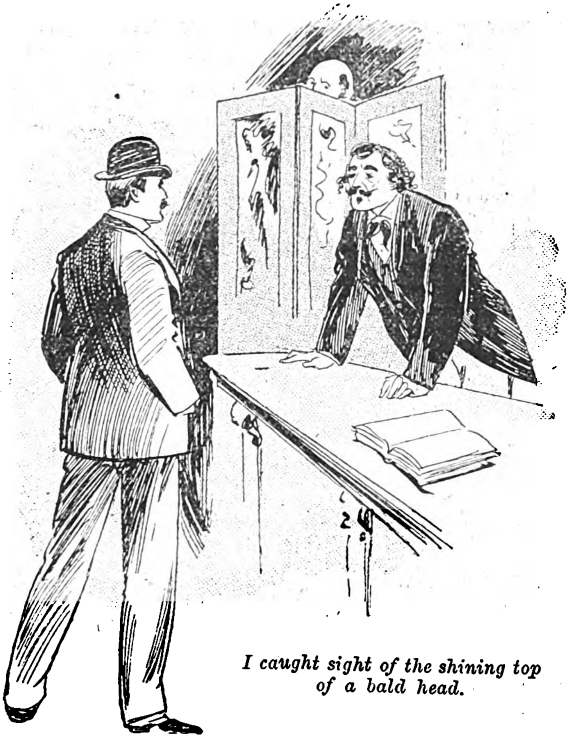
"You act as agents for the owners of the steamer *Queen of Night?*" I asked of the clerk, who came forward with alacrity.

"Yase, sar—Mr. Volpe is agent," was the reply, which promised a sufficient knowledge of English for my purpose.

"Then where the dickins is the ship?" I proceeded, adopting the manner of the irascible Briton on his travels. "Here have I been waiting for her ever since yesterday morning. I was unable to board her in London, so came across the Continent to join her here for the rest of the trip. The delay is very annoying!"

At that moment I caught sight of the shining top of a bald head, raised an inch above the screen, as if someone behind it were changing his position. It disappeared so quickly as not to distract my attention from the clerk's reply.

"It is mose unforchnit, sar, that you should be so discommode," he said. "I regret ver moosh that there can be no booking per *Queen of Night* from Naples. After leaving Genoa she called for orders at Leghorn, and received instructions by cable from the owners to proceed to Cagliari in Sardinia, whence she goes direct to Alexandria. She does not come to Naples at all."



I caught sight of the shining top of a bald head.

This was terrible news, and I was so overcome that I nearly betrayed myself. The villains had evidently arranged that the ship on leaving Genoa should call at Leghorn so that Zavertal could be informed whether I was still safely out of the way at the Convent. In this case they could, without risk of complications, carry out the original programme of visiting Naples; but, if anything should have gone wrong with their plans with regard to the quieting of myself, pursuit on my part was to be stalled off by the simple process of avoiding the port where I should expect to find the ship. The latter contingency had occurred, and by this time the *Queen of Night* must be nearing Cagliari, whence in a few hours she would start for Alexandria, and commence that portion of the voyage over which hung the foreshadowing of such dreadful mystery.

Collecting sense enough to hurl a few natural anathemas at the clerk, I left the office and walked slowly back towards the hotel.

One ray of comfort was alone granted to me. I remembered that Pisa, where Kennard and Vizard had both so mysteriously disappeared, was the junction with the short line running to Leghorn, and I reflected that if Vizard had got on board there, the detective would have had the chance of doing so too.

I hoped frantically that he had availed himself of it, and that his non-communication with me was due to his having gone to those who needed his protection so much more urgently. This thought, however, though it lifted a little off my load, did not compensate me for being left high and dry where I was powerless myself to aid, and directly I reached the hotel I inquired if there were any boats leaving for Cagliari which would give me a chance of catching up the *Queen of Night* before she sailed. Again I met with a rebuff. The day was Thursday. The steamer for Sardinia would not leave till Saturday.

I went up to my room well-nigh in despair, and racked with doubt whether I had better go to the Consulate or try the Italian police authorities. I had nearly, after my last experience, decided in favour of the latter when a waiter knocked at the door and said that a signor—an English signor—was inquiring for me below. Who my visitor could be, unless it was either Kennard or Vizard, I had no idea, but, glad at the prospect of any sort of change from blank inaction, I gave orders for him to be instantly shown up.

Half a minute later I was more mystified than ever, for on the individual, who came tripping obsequiously into the room, I had certainly never set eyes before. He was a middle-aged, rather dissipated-looking, shabbily-dressed man, whose nationality at first sight would have been a mystery if it had not been announced.

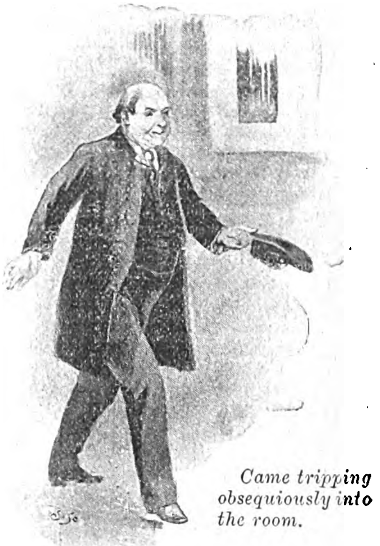
Stranger though he was, there was something about him as he entered that struck a recent chord in my memory, and I scrutinised him more closely to see if I was confronted with yet another disguise. But the notion was no sooner formed than it was dispelled by the discovery of what had seemed familiar in him. It was the shining top of his dome-shaped bald head which had recalled the similar one seen by me an hour before over the screen in Volpe's office; and, suspicious as I was growing of everything and everybody, I recognised that it would be ridiculous to assume that it was the same.

He advanced into the room, smiling and rubbing his hands, and the moment he opened his mouth he chased away all inclination to confound him with anyone else.

"I come from Mr. Kennard," he said. "I saw him in Leghorn yesterday morning shortly before he went aboard the *Queen of Night*, and he took advantage of my being a fellow-countryman of yours to intrust me with a message to you. He said I should probably find you at one of the hotels facing the Bay."

"Pray sit down, sir, and make yourself comfortable," I said, wheeling a chair for him. "I have been most anxious about Mr. Kennard, and at my wits' end as to how to communicate with him. Did he say anything of the circumstances under which we parted at Pisa?"

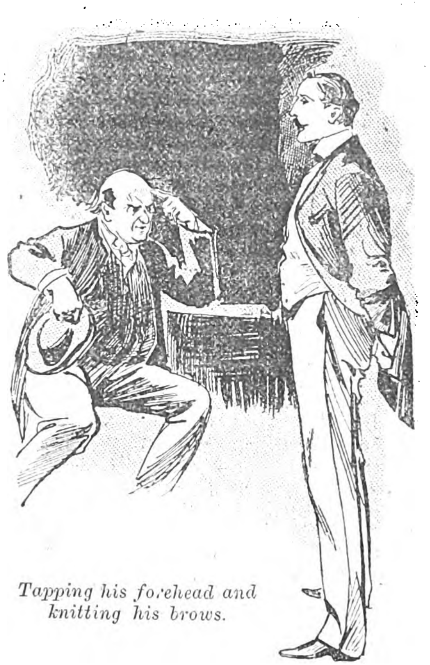
"Not a word, and for the reason that there was no time," replied my visitor. "I made Mr. Kennard's acquaintance quite casually in a hotel at Leghorn ten minutes before he was going on board. Finding that I was coming on to Naples he asked me to make inquiries for you in the hotels along the sea front, and to tell you in these words that the ship's programme having been altered he thought it best to go in her, especially as he had ascertained that a certain person—you would understand who—had gone on board. He concluded by begging me to urge you to join him at Cagliari, even if you had to hire a special boat to get there as he had every hope at that port of bringing matters to an



Came tripping obsequiously into the room.

issue, and of inducing certain mutual friends, I think he said, to leave the ship."

This was good news indeed. The person alluded to as having gone on board at Leghorn was evidently Vizard; but neither he nor Zavertal would be half so dangerous with the detective at hand to watch their every move. A great deal would depend, however, on whether he was on board in his own character for still successfully disguised as the old American general, and I questioned my visitor as to how Mr. Kennard was dressed.



Tapping his forehead and knitting his brows.

"You require proof of my having met Mr. Kennard?" he said, showing at once by his manner that he had put upon my question a construction I had not intended it to bear. The information he brought tallied so exactly with my previous surmise, and with what I had learned at Volpe's office, that to doubt him after he had made his statement never crossed my mind, and I hastened to disclaim any such intention.

"I am glad to hear you say that," he replied, "for it would be hard to meet with such a reception after going to the expense of considerable time and trouble to do a service to strangers. I am sorry to say that I suffer from shortness of sight, and did not take particular notice of your friend's costume. By the way, allow me to rectify an omission—I should have introduced myself on entering. My name is Matthew Mayfield. I am a missionary working among the English sailors who frequent Italian ports."

I should certainly never have guessed Mr. Mayfield's profession from his appearance, though I had had enough experience of long-shore preachers to know that they do not usually wear purple and fine linen. The disclosure of his avocation inspired me with a new idea, and I promptly asked him if he knew of any private boat on the point of sailing for Cagliari, or which could be chartered for that purpose at a moderate figure. I had taken the precaution on the previous day to wire home to the bankers who had my modest savings in their charge, and they had cabled back a credit of two hundred pounds for me to their local agents. I was willing, nay eager, to spend every penny of it in getting to Cagliari.

But Mr. Mayfield shook his head. "A sailing vessel could easily be procured at a small sum to put you across to the island, but it would not take less than two and a half days under the most favourable conditions of wind and tide. That, I understand, would be too late to catch the *Queen of Night*. There are no small steamers here disengaged which could be got ready for sea at such short notice."

Polishing the top of his shining head with a red handkerchief, he rose as if to go, then flopped down in his chair again, tapping his forehead and knitting his brows with the air of a man who was trying to remember. "Yes, it *was* this evening," he said aloud to himself at last. "My dear sir," he went on, "it is just possible that I may be of assistance to you after all. There is a steam yacht here belonging to a London gentleman named Smith. She is named the *Miranda*, and I know her skipper, Captain Dicey, very well. But what is more to the point, I believe that she is under orders from the owner to proceed to Cagliari this very night. Mr. Smith is not on board, as he purposes joining the yacht in Sardinia, where he has been shooting while she came to Naples to refit. I think I can induce Captain Dicey to give you a passage—on the quiet—for a ten-pound note or so."

"He shall have twenty if he will put me across," I said eagerly, "and twenty more if he gets me there before the *Queen of Night* leaves. Will you see him, Mr. Mayfield, and place me under an eternal obligation?"

"I will go at once," was the reply, "it is one of the sweetest pleasures vouchsafed to us poor labourers in the vineyard to befriend our fellow-countrymen in their need. It is now nearly one. Expect me back in an hour from now."

And he went out, leaving me wondering at the combination of so much disinterested goodness with an extremely unprepossessing exterior.

CHAPTER XVII.

UNDER THE SWING LAMP.

I WAS not destined to improve my acquaintance with Mr. Matthew Mayfield. I would give a good deal for a quiet half-hour's interview with him now in some room with the door locked and the key thrown out of the window; but on that eventful day I was ungrateful enough to be just as pleased with the greasy note he sent me at the end of the hour as I should have been with his reappearance in person. I am afraid I regarded him rather too lightly as a means to an end, and though, within limits, I was right, I came nigh to paying dearly for my disrespect.

The note ran as follows:

DEAR SIR,—I have been called away to visit a dying seaman—poor fellow, I fear he is unrepentant—at the far end of the Bay, and shall therefore not be able to give myself the pleasure of waiting upon you.

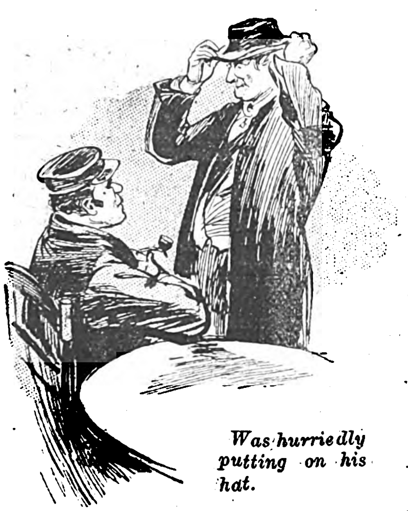
But in the meanwhile I have seen Captain Dicey of the *Miranda*, and he will be willing to oblige you on the terms mentioned. The yacht is lying off the Little Mole, and will sail for Cagliari punctually at six this evening. You should be on board in plenty of time, as Dicey says he can't wait. The run will take about twenty-five hours, and you thus stand a great chance of finding the *Queen of Night* still off the port. Wishing you a speedy passage and a happy reunion with your friends, also assuring you of the privilege which I feel it to have been of service to you,—I remain, yours obediently, MATTHEW MAYFIELD.

P.S.—Captain Dicey is an excellent fellow, and as honest as the day, but of course, as the master of a small steam yacht, is not a man of much culture and refinement.

"Culture and refinement be hanged, so long as he runs me across to Cagliari before the *Queen* leaves the island," I cried, and I hurried off to the hotel bureau to square my account and give up my room. My baggage did not trouble me, since I had nothing but a few articles I had purchased for present requirements, and these were comfortably stowed in a hand-bag. Having made my small preparations I found that I had still three hours to kill before the yacht sailed, and I decided that a portion at least of the time might be profitably spent in the selection and purchase of a revolver, for I did not know what was before me when I should again stand face to face with Zavertal and Vizard.

I went for the purpose to the shops on the Strada Chiaja, and after providing myself with a very good weapon, strolled along to the Little Mole to have a look at the *Miranda*. With my limited capabilities for asking my way, I had some little difficulty in finding her among the crowds of shipping, and when I did I can't say that I thought much of her.

She was very small, being under a hundred tons, and her appearance did not suggest that the refit she had been undergoing had been very extensive. A couple of swarthy sailors, certainly not Englishmen, were busy furbishing up her dingy brass work, and a stream of smoke from a black and rather rusty funnel showed that the fires were alight and steam in process of being got up. After all, the capabilities of her engine-room were what I was most interested in, and though the boat was anything but the smart craft I had expected, there was nothing to show that she was not fast.


Was hurriedly putting on his hat.

By a frequent repetition of the word "Capitano" I managed to make one of the sailors understand that I wanted the Captain, and being informed by gesture that he was on shore, I decided to take a walk in the neighbourhood till he should put in an appearance. Turning into a by-street in the crowded part at the back of the harbour, I was reminded by the sight of a small restaurant that I had been too occupied to think of food since breakfast, and I went in and sat down at one of the small tables.

The room was a long one, with a door at the far end forming a second entrance from another street, and at that hour was unoccupied, save by the waiters, and by a couple of customers seated together over a bottle of wine at a distant table. The pair being separated from me by the length of the room, I did not, on entering, pay any attention to them; but, after giving my order, and while waiting to be served, I allowed my eyes to stray their way.

One of them had arisen, and was hurriedly putting on his hat previous to departure. A second later he had vanished through the door near him into the street, but not before I had intercepted a furtive glance cast at myself, and had recognised in the fugitive Mr. Matthew Mayfield, the longshore missionary who had procured me passage in the *Miranda*, and who, according to his own statement, ought to have been soothing the last moments of a dying seaman at the further side of the Bay.

I attributed his hasty flight and evident desire to avoid me to a not unnatural dislike to have the discrepancy detected. I cannot say that the sight of him hobnobbing there in a restaurant so far from his supposed sphere of duty caused me actual uneasiness, but it certainly made me look at his companion with an interest I should not otherwise have felt. The now solitary occupant of the distant table sat still, steadily finishing the bottle of wine, and, I suppose, not having Mayfield's reason, evinced no concern in me or in my affairs.

He was a heavy, squat-built man of the bull-dog type, and though he was too far off for me to note more than the outline of his features, or to judge of his expression, he gave me the general idea of his being what is known as an "ugly customer." Not much was to be learned from his shabby, ill-fitting suit of blue serge, and from the unbraided cheese-cutter cap he was wearing, except that he was a seafarer of not very exalted rank; and I ticked him off as the engineer, or mate of a tramp steamer.

Having outstayed Mr. Matthew Mayfield by some five minutes, he slouched heavily through the further door and disappeared.

By the time I had finished my refreshment and paid the score it was five o'clock, and I made my way back to the Mole in the hope that the master of the *Miranda* had come aboard. The sailors had knocked off work and were lounging in the bows, where they had been joined by a third man, also an Italian, and, from his greasy, smoke-begrimed clothes, probably the combined engineer and fireman of this curiously manned and much-worn "yacht."

On this occasion my appearance at the gang-plank seemed to excite some interest among the crew, and almost before I sang out my one word of inquiry—"Capitano?"—one of them rose and shouted through a skylight, the others eyeing me strangely the while. The man's summons met with an answering hail from below, and immediately a head was protruded from the companion-hatch that caused me something of a shock. The reason was this: the head belonged to the rough-and-tumble individual whom I had seen half an hour before in the restaurant *tête-à-tête* with Mayfield.

"Cap'n Forrester?" he sang out.

"Yes; I am here by arrangement with Mr. Mayfield," I replied.

He turned and put his head back into the companion-hatch for two seconds, then came right out on deck and invited me to step aboard.

"You won't find no luxuries on this 'ere steam-yacht," he added, as I crossed the plank, "but she's a demon to go."

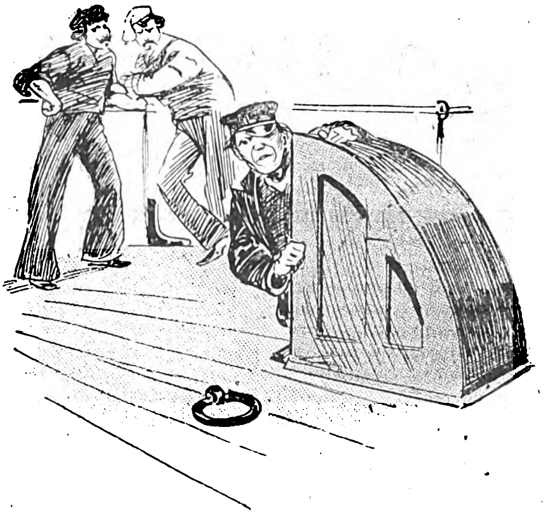
"You are Captain Dicey, I suppose?" I said, as he received me with a rough hand-shake.

"That's me—likewise not much to look at, but a demon to go," was his reply. "You're prepared to hand over the dibs, 'cording to contract?"

I put the stipulated amount in his grimy hand, and was proceeding to assure him that he should have another twenty pounds on landing, provided I caught the *Queen of Night*, when he cut me short with the remark that he made no blooming doubt about hooking the balance; it was as good as in his pocket already.

"And now, seeing as the cargo's aboard, there's nothing to hinder us getting under weigh," he added. "You just amuse yourself while I do the needful, and when we're clear of port I'll show you your bunk and the saloon."

Going forward, he shouted to his crew in Italian, and when they were at their posts the mooring rope was cast off, and we were soon steaming across the Bay towards the declining sun. Dicey himself steered from the small erection, hardly to be called a bridge, for'ard of the funnel, and seating myself in the stern I paid critical attention to the


"Cap'n Forrester?" he sang out.

steaming capacity of the vessel. The opinion I formed, as soon as we were at "full speed ahead," was that the phrase "a good 'un to go" as applied to the *Miranda* was a decided misnomer. Her engines were better than might have been expected from her dilapidated appearance, but she certainly was not fast, and I began to grow anxious as to the result of the attempt to head off my enemies.

On other grounds, too, a feeling of uneasiness stole over me, now that I had time to calmly consider the circumstances under which I found myself on this strange craft. I had not been much smitten with Mr. Matthew Mayfield's manners and appearance, and it had only been the service he came to render that reconciled me to him. My confidence in him had received a rude shock in his desire to avoid me at the restaurant, and really, now that I came to think of it, had his account of himself been correct, there would have been no reason for such avoidance. He would, if everything had been above-board, have made some excuse for his change of plans and have come forward to introduce me to Dicey.

Again, the *Miranda* and her crew opened up a wide field of conjecture that was not very reassuring. The vessel might have been used as a yacht at some early stage in her history, but there was certainly nothing about her to show that she had been "in commission" lately. She gave me more the impression of a superannuated steamer that had been "laying up" for sale, and that she had been hurriedly prepared for sea at short notice.

The hands, too, with the exception of the skipper, were all Italians, which, to say the least of it, was an incongruity in an English-owned yacht, and was a good deal more in accordance with the theory that the boat had been hired or purchased for a special purpose. If so, what was that purpose likely to be? Was it possible that Mayfield and Dicey were emissaries of Vizard and Zavertal, charged with the duty of luring me into another trap?

These unpleasant reflections were interrupted by the approach of one of their subjects. We were now fast leaving the land, and the lights of the port, just beginning to twinkle in the fast gathering twilight, would be soon left far behind. Dicey gave the helm to one of the men, and came lurching aft, a figure far more suggestive of a waterside bully or loafer than of a gentleman's sailing master.

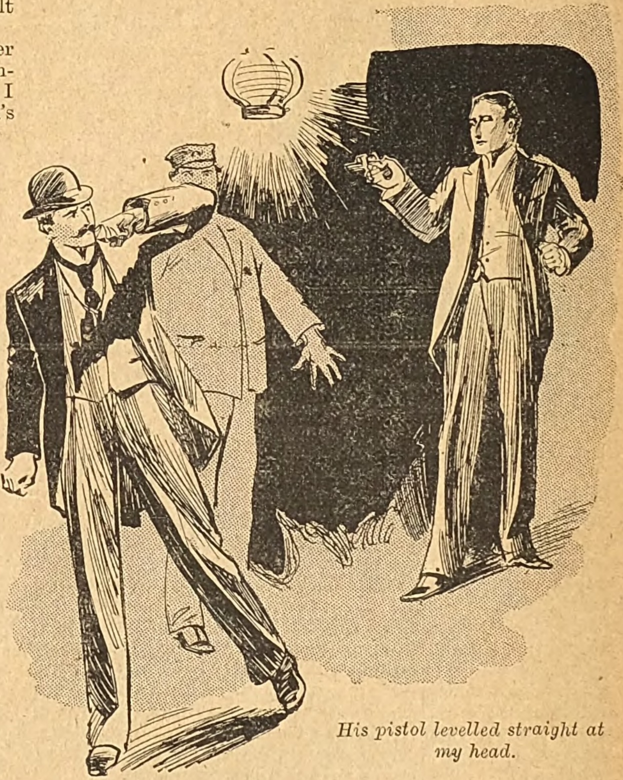
"Now, Cap'n, maybe you'd like to go below for a bite and a sup," he said. "I'm on board wages, and the steward is on leave, so there's no table-cloths nor finger-glasses, you understand."

I should rather think there were no table-cloths and finger glasses in the mouldy, evil-smelling den into which he ushered me, and probably never had been. The cuddy was not more than fifteen feet long, and the narrow, ladder-like stair ran straight down into it. A couple of cabins on either side blocked all source of daylight except such as filtered through the dusty skylight, and now that night was falling, only the bare desolation of the place was visible. Dicey kicked open the door of one of the cabins, which, so far as I could see, was devoid of all furniture save a bed-place and a bench.

"There's your quarters," he said. "Hold on while I light the cuddy lamp, so as you can stow your bag."

There was a certain tremor, not exactly nervous, but rather of eagerness, in his voice that somehow put me on my guard against I knew not what. It was as though he had been working up to a crisis which was now at hand and he wished to be through with it. At least, that was the way it took me in my suspicious frame of mind, and it had the effect of making me follow him out of the cabin into the cuddy while he lit the lamp. I had already registered an intention to spend the night on deck; for the narrow cabin, barely five feet across, was too much of a *cul-de-sac* for a man labouring under my apprehensions to be left alone in, even for a minute. I had got the feeling that I wanted to see all that went on on board the *Miranda*, and, above all, *to be ready*.

Dicey's stumpy, grime-stained fingers fumbled with a match-box, and soon the swing-lamp over the centre table broke into a brilliant glow that for the moment dazzled me, falling as it did full across my face. Then, while my eyes were still struggling with the sudden glare, Dicey stepped quickly back from me, and a sternly melodious voice from the darkness of the recess behind the mast told me that the crisis had indeed come.


His pistol levelled straight at my head.

"So, Forrester, my friend," came the well-remembered tones, "the *next time* I promised you has arrived, you see, in spite of your clumsy efforts to postpone it."

And then my eyes, grown accustomed to the change of light at last, fastened on Vizard standing not eight feet away, his pistol levelled straight at my head, while Dicey flattened himself against the wall to let the bullet pass.

(To be continued.)

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ALCOHOLISM AND OBESITY.

It is often rashly asserted that drunkenness is uncommon on the European Continent, and that, in particular, it is a rare vice in France. Certain medical therapeutists and specialistic scientists have, however, recently furnished some suggestive statistics which flatly contradict the cherished beliefs of those who have persistently proclaimed the sobriety of the French people. Dr. Lancereaux, at the French Academy of Medicine, having made a special study of the subject, declares that in his extensive hospital practice out of twenty patients ten are, on an average, suffering from some form of alcoholic poisoning—women being responsible for a large proportion of the enormous consumption of alcohol thus indicated. The learned doctor sums up the results on the population at large as representing a mortality greater than that caused by the greatest epidemics, the ruin of labour, and—what is already startlingly evident in France—the steady diminution of the very population of the country. Other authorities, again, assert that with the annual increase in the consumption of spirits, to the extent of nearly 500,000 gallons in various liquors, there has been a corresponding increase of corpulence. This appears to make alcohol responsible for the troublesome and sometimes dangerous increase of unhealthy adispose tissue on the strength of the somewhat slipshod theory of the affinity of alcohol for oxygen in the system. It is certainly worthy of note that some of the most eminent authorities on the Continent and in America absolutely debar the corpulent from drinking alcohol in any shape or form, while on the other hand one of the most prominent and successful specialists in England boldly and flatly contradicts, on this point, his professional brethren. He permits those undergoing his treatment to drink the spirits of their choice—although he does not advocate the use of these beverages. The result of his experiments is that he can reduce a person's weight from 3lb. to 6lb. in a week, although the patient may drink alcohol even to excess; nor will any extra decrease in weight be experienced by a restriction of the amount of drink consumed. His aim is to attack corpulence at its very root, and to achieve this he does not approve of such a drastic measure as the sudden and indiscriminate stoppage of a person's accustomed spirituous drink; for there are many who have so habitually used themselves to their "dram" that its prohibition is unquestionably a great hardship, if not actually dangerous. Again, he takes exception to the action of the majority of specialists in dealing with obesity, in prescribing a limited diet. To this he takes exception on the very reasonable ground (to quote from his clever 256-paged book, entitled "Corpulency, and the Cure," by F. C. Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.), that with the reduction of fat by his process, the most unhealthy portion of this excess tissue, such as those which clog the vital organs, begin to waste first, and, as a consequence, the entire system becomes healthier within the first twenty-four hours of the treatment. Then immediately the patient begins to be exhilarated by such symptoms as the freedom of breathing, the stronger and steadier action of the heart, the feeling of lightness, the absence of the sense of oppression—each organ performing its duty with increased regularity. He finds himself aroused suddenly from a lethargic heaviness and morbid drowsiness which have probably lasted for years; he feels, as it were, born anew, and instantly becomes more active and buoyant, both in body and mind—all of which pleasurable sensations are naturally accompanied by an increase of appetite. It is not necessary to be a scientist or a medical expert to adopt the common sense view of these matters. "Would you, then," argues Mr. Russell, "in the case of a person who for years, perhaps, has never known what a healthy appetite means, deprive him of food when Nature appealingly holds forth her hands, literally begging for it? No! those who reduce fat by starvation pay for their folly at usurers' interest when meeting the bills drawn against them on the Bank of Longevity. Let other specialists prescribe this; I will not countenance it," says Mr. Russell. Notwithstanding the increased amount of food taken daily, the weight, under the operation of his system is steadily reduced, to which unerring testimony is given by the weighing-machine. The painstaking research and the marvellous success of the author of the above-named work justify us in arriving at the conclusion that his system may be followed with absolute confidence. His success is all the more remarkable because the whole secret consists in the use of a few herbal roots and a simple vegetable acid. We believe it is the only system of reducing obesity—and it is a very pleasant system—which is certain in its results and brings no after-penalties. We commend his book to our readers. It may be obtained post free by sending six penny stamps to Mr. Russell at the address already given.—*Brighton Examiner*, August 9th, 1895.

WORDS THAT FIT THE FACTS

"HORRID" and "hateful" are (particularly) women's words. The man who has not noticed this fact is a dunce—like the majority of his sex. As the women use them, these two words have a cutting edge—an appropriateness, a certain snugness of fit not seen in the dictionaries. You will come upon these words in Milton, Dryden, and other old English authors, who knew how to select their verbal tools from the great chest of our noble language. And what *they* knew by craft, *bright women* know by their keen sense of the truth of things.

Now, in a woman's letter here at hand is a sentence ending with these three words—"*that horrid dyspepsia.*" It is a photograph, which, as Wilkie Collins says, "is justice without mercy."

Have you, who now read what is here set down, ever had this dyspepsia, or have you got it now? Yes? Then you will accept Mrs. Pallister's pat adjective. In the proper definition of "horrid" we have the elements of fear and disgust. Is that right, too? Yes.

"In May, 1890," she says, "I suffered greatly from indigestion. My appetite was poor, and after everything I ate I was troubled with pain and weight in the chest. No matter how light and simple my diet was, I had just the same unpleasant and painful feeling. My stomach turned against everything, and, as a consequence, I became very weak and feeble.

"Month after month I remained in this condition. I used the various so-called remedies commonly prescribed for indigestion, but none of them relieved me.

"In the following September a friend strongly recommended me to try Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup, and in obedience thereto I procured a supply from a near-by chemist. It gives me pleasure to report the result, and perhaps I ought to have done so long ago. After taking the Syrup for one week only, I experienced great relief. My appetite improved and my food agreed with me. Cheered and encouraged, I continued to use it, and in a few weeks found myself completely free from pain; and, indeed, from all the symptoms which attended this most vexatious and wearing of complaints.

"In evidence of the thorough and radical character of my cure, I may mention that although it took place over four years ago, I have since had no return of *that horrid dyspepsia.*

"My husband, who has suffered from time to time with a painful form of liver derangement and indigestion, seeing what Mothers Seigel's Syrup did for me, tried it, and has found immediate benefit from taking only a few doses. We both commend it to all our friends who suffer from indigestion and dyspepsia, and the local ailments arising therefrom. We know many persons who have derived the greatest benefit from its use after the doctors have failed to help them. I feel confident that a vast amount of suffering might be prevented if this remedy were more widely known. And in hope that my short letter may be of use in that direction, I freely accord you permission to make it public. (Signed) Rose Emily Pallister, Jubilee House, Long Clawson, Leicestershire, November 7th, 1894."

We should mention that this lady is the wife of the Reverend William Pallister, the Wesleyan Minister of Long Clawson.

As to making Mother Seigel's Syrup more widely known, we are constantly doing our best to that end. Probably it is already more widely known than any other medicine in the world. Accounts of it are printed in all languages all over the earth, and yet millions of sufferers from "that horrid dyspepsia" remain to be reached. But even more than the printers we thank the *women* for heralding the name of Seigel's Syrup from town to town and from door to door. What *they* say goes farther and abides longer than what *we* say, for they know what "that horrid dyspepsia" is and how surely this remedy cures it.

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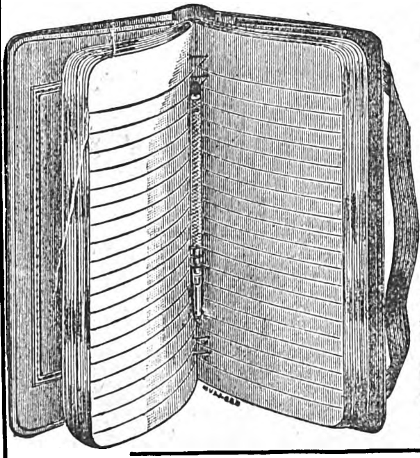

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SHORT STORIES

Edited by C. Arthur Pearson.

No. 359.] For the Week ending November 16th, 1895. [One Penny.

THE LADY OF THE CIGARETTES.

SHE was a little brown thing with marvellous liquid eyes, like unfathomable pools of ink, set in a small, oval, impish face.

Her friends nicknamed her the Lady of the Cigarettes, because she was seldom visible without a slim slip of a scented cigarette between her flashing rows of tiny, rice-kernel teeth.

Harcourt met her first in the wings of the Frivolity stage, where she sat poised upon an impossible painted stump, puffing at the inevitable cigarette and awaiting the cue for the ballet.

She was made up atrociously. Harcourt was an artist, and he recognised that fact at once with a super-sensitive twinge. However, the badly-managed grease paint on her cheeks, and the thick layers of Indian ink round her eyes, did not wholly disguise her elfish individuality, or the beauty of those liquid wells of shadow which illuminated her plain little face.

At first Harcourt thought it was those wonderful soft, dark mirrors that distinguished her from the common herd of ballet girls, and, later, he decided that it was the witchery of her glancing little teeth.

"What do you think of Cigarette?" Thorwald, the reporter, asked, as they stumbled out of the dingy stage entrance together.

"Nothing," Harold replied tersely.

Thorwald laughed easily.

"She's a fascinating little imp. Look out for yourself."

Harcourt sniffed disdainfully.

"Spare me your warnings," he said haughtily. "A girl of that stamp is not my style at all."

At that very moment Cigarette's toes were twinkling merrily in the front row of the ballet, while her lips were parted roguishly in the approved smile.

Strange to say, she was thinking about Harcourt. This was a very flattering circumstance, for Cigarette rarely deigned to think about anything, let alone a mere man.

"Men are so plentiful," she was wont to remark pathetically, in her soft, plaintive, contralto voice. And so they were, in her sphere.

Harcourt, however, was not in her sphere, and clever little Cigarette recognised that fact immediately.

"He's a real gentleman," Cigarette told herself in time to the rattling orchestra, "and I'd like to know him."

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The next time Harcourt ran across her was a year later at her *début* as a comic opera *prima donna.*

Cigarette was one of those interesting constellations that blaze suddenly into a flame of brilliant notoriety, and, after a brief flash of glory, shoot downwards into oblivion and are lost to sight for ever.

Harcourt happened to stroll into the theatre upon the first night of Cigarette's scintillation among the heavenly bodies of light, and sat, or rather stood, the first act through. He soon decided that the score of the opera was horribly mediocre and the book wretchedly dull, but he lingered on, held by a spell of magnetism emanating from a pair of wonderful dark eyes.

"She has learned how to make up," was his first thought, as he gazed eagerly across the footlights at the naturally painted face of the *petite artiste.*

When the curtain dropped Harcourt left the theatre, determined to go elsewhere. He lit a cigarette, and started up the avenue. The cigarette was a very good one, and in some unaccountable way it brought back a vague recollection of his first meeting with a wicked little lady of that name. A soft mist of smoke encircled his head, drifted before his eyes, filled his nostrils, clouded his brain. From out the faint blue rings grew a pair of melting black eyes, smiling coquettishly, daringly, into his face.

Suddenly he paused. "She must be on the stage again by this time," he told himself. Then he rushed to the theatre.

As he entered the place for the second time Thorwald touched his elbow.

"Where have you been, old man?" Thorwald asked. "Miss Greyson sent me to tell you to come and see her. She is in the stage-box on the left, and spied you during last act."

Harcourt pulled himself together.

"All right, lead the way," he said with assumed alacrity, and a few moments later, Cigarette, bursting upon the stage amid a torrent of orchestration, espied his handsome, dark head bending very tenderly above Miss Lillian Greyson's fair curls.

Cigarette's eyes widened wickedly, and her little teeth gleamed cruelly at the sight.

She had not forgotten her brief acquaintance with this man, who never even deigned to notice her when she passed him.

The next day Harcourt received through Thorwald an invitation to a wine supper given by the newly-fledged *prima donna* to commemorate her successful first appearance.

His unexpected presence at that uproariously Bohemian affair overwhelmed Thorwald with consternation. The latter was aware of Harcourt's recently announced engagement to the stately Miss Greyson, and he mentally anathematised Cigarette when he saw her favour Harcourt by seating him at her right hand.

Thorwald, however, was compelled to acknowledge the fascination of his hostess.

"By Jove!" he told himself, "if I had not learned my lesson so thoroughly I believe I should make an ass of myself again over that little imp. She's a bit of concentrated magnetism. Zeus! What eyes she has, and what a deliciously wicked little mouth! Well, I can see that it is inevitable that Harcourt is bound to make an ass of himself."

Harcourt meanwhile was entirely oblivious of everybody and everything except the alluring, laughing, elfish little being at his side.

Presently Cigarette turned away from him and favoured the ruddy-face ponderous individual at her other side with a brilliant smile and a witty sally.

Harcourt immediately hated that man. He felt that it would be a positive pleasure to throttle him, and he mentally anathematised the vulgar little millionaire until Cigarette again leant in his direction and mischievously puffed a voluminous cloud of faint, pearly tinged smoke from between her vivid carmine lips into his very face, and coquettishly inclined her head nearer and nearer his own until those glorious misty eyes seemed to melt into his very soul, sending a twinge of rapture thrilling through all his being.

That was the beginning of what was in reality a double existence for Harcourt.

On the occasion when he found himself in the society of the cultured, high-bred Miss Greyson he felt an intense, overwhelming tenderness for her, and loathed himself because of the mad, unhealthy fascination which had grown into his life.

Then the moment he left Miss Greyson's presence he was haunted by Cigarette's enticing black eyes, and they followed him hour by hour like a tangible presence, and wrought upon his imagination until he rushed off to Cigarette's apartment and assuaged the mad longing by gazing his fill into their unfathomable depths, and kissing all the impishness out of the little brown face.

And Cigarette. What did she think of the handsome, impetuous young artist who made love to her with all the condescension of a prince, and demanded her caresses as though they were his due?

It was a new sensation for her. She thought Harcourt loved her, and she had never been truly loved before. The handsome artist gentleman was a revelation to the plebeian girl who had been educated in the slums of the metropolis. His refinement, his talent, his tenderness towards her constituted a charm that touched that part of Cigarette that would have been a heart in anyone else, and she proceeded to worship him with all the fervour and wild impetuosity of her tempestuous nature.

Sometimes Harcourt found his enchantress rather impossible.

One night—it was Christmas Eve—he carried her a diamond bracelet.

Cigarette opened the dainty parcel, all the while puffing sullenly at her cigarette. When she saw the bauble her small features set themselves in a diabolical scowl, and she flung the jewelled band into Harcourt's face.

Then she threw her small self into his arms and burst into a storm of sobs and reproaches.

"Why did you buy me that? Oh, why did you offer it to me?" she cried. "Other men have given me diamonds. I don't want them from you. You have always treated me differently—more as other women are treated."

"My darling!" Harcourt protested soothingly; "but I didn't know. I thought you liked such things. I wanted to give you some sort of remembrance. What can I get that will please you?"

"Will you give me whatever I choose?" asked Cigarette, with as near an approach of shyness as she had ever experienced.

"Why, of course I will, little girl."

"I want a portrait of you—not a photograph," quickly, as Harcourt made a motion towards the centre table, whereon rested a large cabinet photo of himself in a superb silver frame. "I want a miniature, a painting on ivory, like those you showed me the other day."

"Very well, you shall have a minature of me, but it will not be ready in time for Christmas."

"Then you shall give me your working palette with the colours smeared on just as you showed it to me in your studio last week. I don't know of anything else you have handled so tenderly and lovingly as that palette. I will fasten it on the wall of my dressing-room, where it will always speak to me of your dear self, and your beloved art."

Harcourt was as good as his word, and in due time Cigarette received an exquisite miniature executed by a noted artist.

It was a year from the date of the commencement of Harcourt's infatuation, when he awoke one day to the fact that the haunting black eyes were not as haunting as they had been.

He was no longer intoxicated by Cigarette's presence, and once or twice lately when he kissed her he experienced the slightest possible sensation of repulsion at the smoke on her breath.

Now and again he was rudely shocked by a chance glimpse of the dense illiteracy which underlaid her superficial, scintillating cleverness.

One day Thorwald, in a spirit of curiosity, told Cigarette that Harcourt was going to be married.

"So!" she said. "Have a cigarette?"

"She's absolutely heartless," Thorwald muttered when he left her.

Cigarette did not cry after Thorwald left her. She scorned tears as a cowardly weakness.

"I'll go and see him," she decided desperately, "just once, for the last time." And the next day Harcourt found her in possession of his chambers when he returned from breakfast.

"Mornin', old fellow. Have a cigarette?" she said, with all her accustomed *sang-froid*.

"What do you mean by coming here?" Harcourt inquired, coldly and a trifle uneasily.

"Came to see you, dear boy. You used to beg me to come. Don't you remember?" And Cigarette seated herself on top of the big table amid the *débris* of odd pipes, tobacco jars, and quaint *bric-à-brac*, looking like a queer bit of an Eastern curio herself.

"Listen. Cigarette, I am going to get married. Do you understand? And we must stop all that sort of nonsense."

Cigarette laughed, and puffed nervously at her perfumed holder.

"I know all about it," she said. "I only came to say good-bye, old chap. Can't you put up with me long enough for that?"

Harcourt still felt doubtful. She looked so eerie and witch like and wicked wreathed with a curtain of drifting smoke, that he mistrusted her good intentions.

At that moment voices sounded indistinctly on the landing outside Harcourt's door, followed by an assured knock thereon.

Harcourt paled.

"There is Miss Greyson," he breathed. "What shall I do with you?" And he turned upon Cigarette furiously. "Why did you come here to spoil my life?"

"Here's a cupboard just big enough for me, old fellow. Let your friend come in. I won't be in the way." And Cigarette fitted her tiny self into a wee bit of a cupboard, scarcely large enough for a good-sized mouse to be comfortable in.

There was no help for it, so Harcourt admitted his lady-love and her chaperon, and entertained them with a nervous energy.

As Lillian Greyson expressed it to her chaperon afterwards: "He seemed so exceedingly glad to see us that he got rid of us as quickly as possible."

Their retreating footsteps still echoed in the corridor when Harcourt opened the cupboard door,

"Really!" he exclaimed, "you might have had sense enough to put your cigarette out. I could see smoke drifting through the cracks of the door all the while they were here. Good Heavens! Cigarette, what's this?"

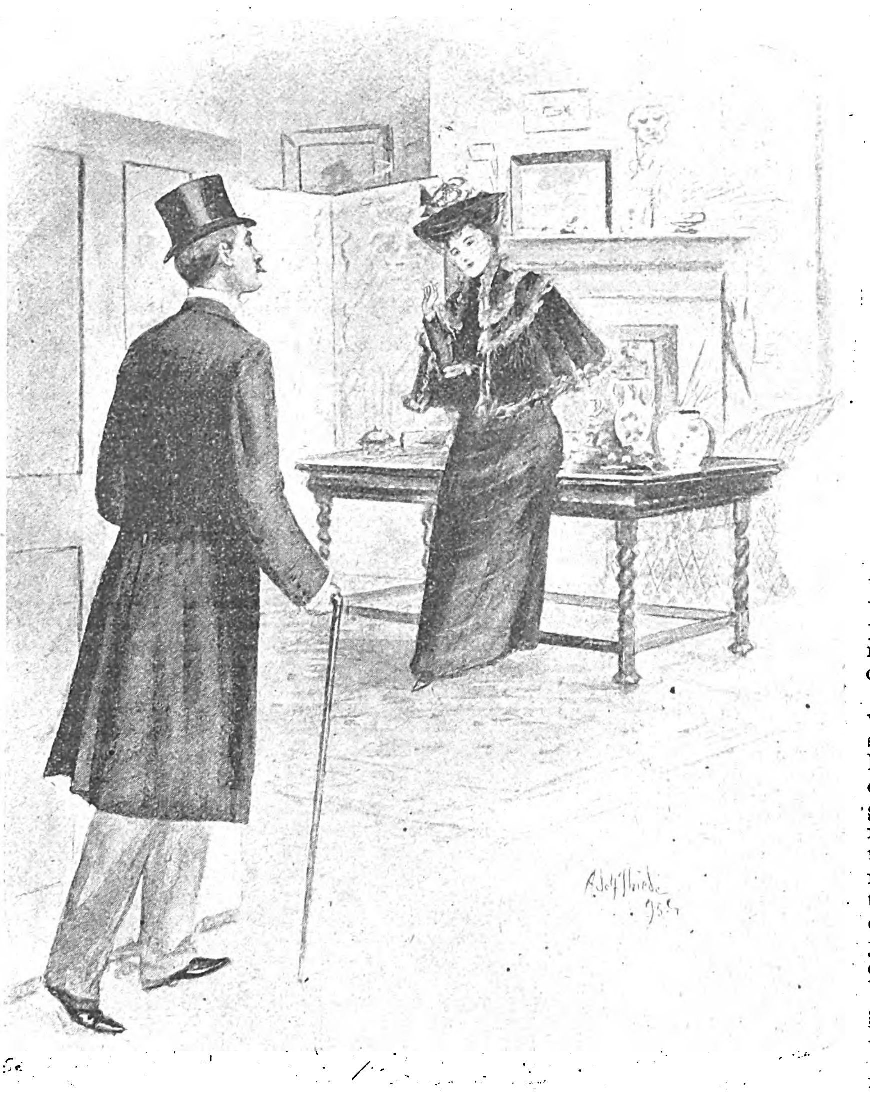
Cigarette stumbled out into the room, her garments all aflame.

It's nothing much, dear boy," she gasped as Harcourt wrapped her in a heavy rug. "My cigarette dropped on my dress, and I was afire before I knew it. I felt myself burning but I couldn't do anything; and I didn't call out, old boy, because that would have got you into trouble, and besides I didn't mind if I was burned up as I was to lose you. Better get me home. It's all right, old man. Don't feel so bad."

Harcourt was sobbing by this time. The fire was out, but poor little Cigarette's body was cruelly burned.

"You said I was an electric spark, you know," she went on, with feeble gaiety, "and now I have ignited—spontaneous combustion—I've gone off in smoke just like a cigarette. Dear old boy, I'm glad to go since I've lost you."

Then she fainted, and the doctor who was called said that she could not possibly live for more than twelve hours.



"Mornin', old fellow. Have a cigarette?" she said.

The next day Thorwald met a brother reporter. "Have you heard the news?" he said; "Cigarette's dead. Died last night."

"You don't say so," his *confrère* replied. "What was the trouble?"

"Her clothing caught fire in some way, and she went the way of her beloved cigarette. By the way, are you going to Harcourt's wedding to-morrow? I hear it is to be quite a swagger affair."

Oswald Everett.

GOLDEN ✱ STAR.

A Romance

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

SUMMARY.

On the eve of the fall of the Inca empire Vilcaroya marries Golden Star, and with her drinks a potion, the result of which is a death-like trance, in hope of fulfilling the prophecy that the empire shall be restored by one who has come alive from the grave. Three hundred and sixty years later Professor Lamson brings, as he thinks, Vilcaroya's mummy from Peru to England. His friend Djama believes that he can restore it to life, and does so. Six months later the party return to Peru, Ruth, Djama's sister, going with them. At Panama they meet Hartness, a friend of Lamson's, who joins in the expedition. Arrived in Cuzco, Vilcaroya put himself into communication with the remnant of his people, and prepares to begin his work. He summons one Tupac-Rayca to meet him with twenty others of the old Inca blood on the Rodadero, a plain behind the great fortress. The same night at dinner he accidentally reveals the fact that Golden Star was his sister as well as his wife. It is explained to him that such a union as this is impossible in the modern world. Later on the same night he entices Djama on to the Rodadero and bids his men blindfold him. He then leads them by a way of which he only knows the secret into the Hall of Gold, a subterranean chamber in which some of the treasures of the Incas are hidden, where he dresses himself in the imperial robes, and then, seated on a throne, he receives the oath of allegiance from Tupac and his comrades. He shows Djama the treasures, and promises to load him with them if he will restore Golden Star to life, and threatens him with death if he reveals what he has seen. After this he has some of the gold taken to their lodgings, and with part of this buys a convenient hacienda in the country, and in due course they set out for the resting-place of Golden Star. Her body is found and brought back to the hacienda, and there, when his work is almost finished, Djama refuses to complete it unless Vilcaroya will swear to give Golden Star to him. He refuses, but afterwards consents on condition that Djama will give Ruth to him. Djama brings Ruth, Hartness, and the Professor to Golden Star's bedside. Ruth reproaches them both and reconciles them, making Djama promise to finish his work. This he does, and Golden Star awakes, but has lost her memory. Ruth takes charge of her, and Vilcaroya and Hartness discuss the prospects of the coming war.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Twin-Star Sisters.

We saw nothing of Golden Star the next day, and but little of her for many days afterwards, for, in spite of our impatience, Ruth would not permit us to do so. What her brother had said had speedily proved itself to be true. She had come back to life a child-woman. Her body was that of a girl of seventeen years—which was her age when she and I had drunk the draught of the death-sleep together—and the kindly powers that had presided over her birth had shaped her in a mould of almost perfect womanly beauty, yet, as Djama had said, her mind was a virgin page from which the story of her past life had been utterly erased, and on whose blank whiteness the story of her new life had yet to be written. Now on the writing of the first words of this story, as Joyful Star told us in her sweetly serious way the night that she had sunk into her first natural slumber, everything might depend.

"It is a task," she said, "which I fear terribly to enter upon, and yet I know that I am the only one here who ought to undertake it. It will need weeks and months of the most careful watching, and the sympathy that only another woman and one who loves her as I have already learned to do could give her. No woman ever had such a task before, and very few have had so good a work to do. There is something, too"—and here I remember how subtle a change came into her voice as she said this—"there is something in this wonderful resemblance between us which tells me that this is my duty, and I am going to devote myself absolutely to it during every hour of her waking life until she is able to be without my care. I must watch her and care for her as a mother does for her child, and you must let me do it alone as long as I wish to, just as we had to let Laurens do his work alone. Don't you think I am right, Professor?"

"Yes," he answered, "perfectly right, Miss Ruth. I am sure everybody will agree with me that Her Highness could not be in better hands than yours. Indeed, as you say, yours are the only hands in which she could possibly be trusted with safety to her newly-awakening reason at such an extraordinary juncture in her life."

To this we all agreed willingly enough, and so Joyful Star had the big room cleared out and installed herself there with all the comforts and luxuries that the inexhaustible wealth which was now at my command could provide her with, so that Golden Star should find her new world as beautiful as might be. Meanwhile the Professor, with a trusty guide that I had provided him with from among my own people, plunged afresh into his beloved studies with such ardour that he seemed to have almost forgotten all else that had brought us to Peru. Francis Hartness had gone with Tupac—who, in the sight of the Spaniards, was only his Indian servant and guide—on a mission of importance to the South, where the first rumblings of the coming war-storm were already making themselves heard. As for Djama, who, as you know, had no more interest in the work that now lay before Francis Hartness and myself than the Professor had, he went about for some days gloomy and silent, and seemingly ill at ease, like a man who for a time has lost his interest in life, and at last, it was on the twentieth day after Golden Star had awakened, he came to me when I was alone in my room and said abruptly:

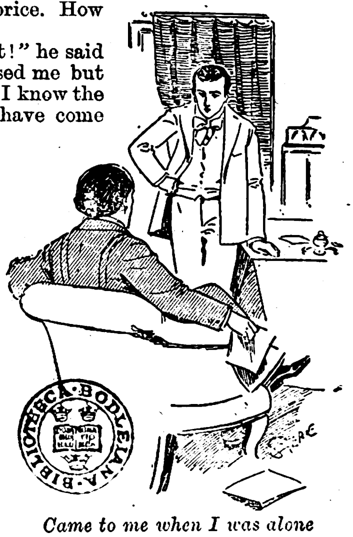
"Vilcaroya, do you think I have fairly earned my reward for what I have done?"

"Yes," I said, looking into his eyes and reading, though he knew it not, the thoughts that were moving in his mind. "You have done all that you promised to do, but we have yet said nothing of the price. How much do you ask for?"

"As much as I can get!" he said with a laugh that pleased me but little. "But, of course, I know the work that you yourself have come here to do, and I see that it will be expensive, so you will find me reasonable."

"And you, I hope, will not find me ungenerous. Do you remember what you saw in the Hall of Gold?" As I said this, his self-command left him for an instant. I saw his hands close, and his lips tremble, and the fierce fire of the gold-lust spring into his eyes. "Yes. How could I forget it?"

"And do you remember, too," I said, "the words that you heard me speak when I was sitting on the throne of Huayni-Capac?"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Came to me when I was alone in my room.

"Yes," he replied, with a faint blush coming into his pale cheeks. "It is not likely that I should forget them either. Why do you ask?"

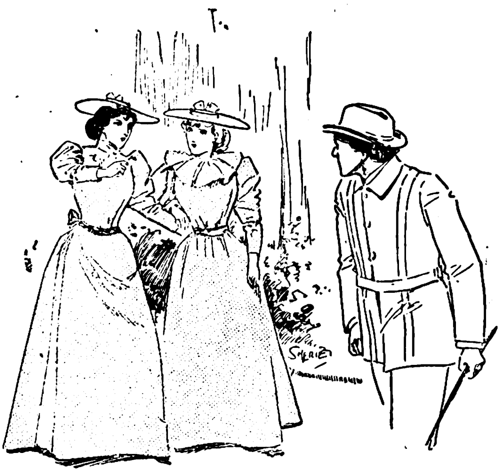
"Because," I said, speaking slowly as a man who weighs his words well, "saving only the golden throne and the sacred emblems of the Sun, which it is not lawful for me to part with, all that you saw there shall belong to you and to him who made it possible for you to do what you have done. You will share it as you please, that is no care of mine, but I have conditions to make for my own sake and that of my people.”

“What are they?” and as he spoke the flush died out of his cheeks again.

“That you shall both swear solemnly to me that, come what may, no man shall ever know from you where the gold came from, and that, moreover, you shall never utter any word of my story or Golden Star's where mortal ears can hear it, nor give any sign or word to any man or woman that shall lead him or her to guess that I am what I am, or that my work here is what it is. Swear that oath to me and you shall take your gold and go in peace. Break it and the fate that I told you of shall be yours. Are you content?”

“Yes,” he said, “and more than content, and I swear to you most solemnly on my own honour, and by all that I hold sacred, that I will keep your secrets absolutely.”

“No, not here,” I said, interrupting him, “and, more, it is not only your oath that I want, and there must be witnesses, for this is too great a thing to do lightly. To-morrow night we will go back to the Hall of Gold, and there you shall swear your oaths and they shall be witnessed.”



Ruth beckoned to me smilingly.

“Very well,” he said. “Whenever and wherever you like. But now, Vilcaroya, I have something else to say to you. Personally, you know I have no further interests in Peru saving one only. Your next few years will be stormy ones, and though I believe that, with the power you have behind you, you will win in the end, yet you know as well as I do that you will have to run all the risks of a war that may be a very savage one before you succeed. You may restore the throne of the Incas, and reign upon it, or you may be killed in the first battle. You will pardon me speaking so plainly, won't you?”

I bowed my head in silence and he went on.

“In view of this, then, I am going to propose that when we leave Peru, I mean my sister and the Professor and myself, you will allow Ruth to take Golden Star to England with her, say, for three years or so, in order that her education may be carried on to the best advantage. I will promise you solemnly that during that time I will not speak a word of love to her or attempt to be anything else to her than I am to Ruth, and then if you succeed in your aims, as I hope you will, we will come back and be your Majesty's guests for a time, and after that we shall see what more the kindly Fates may have in store for you and me.”

No man ever heard more fairly spoken or reasonable-sounding words than these were, and yet all the while I listened to them I knew that they were but used to hide the real thoughts of the man who was speaking them. Yet what could I answer him? Did they not seem to point out the best of all courses that could be followed for the welfare of Golden Star and the comfort of her whose gentle hand was leading her nearer every day to the fulfilment of the promise of her new life? So, for want of anything better in my mind, I answered:

“Your words are unwelcome to me, for so long a parting would be a great sorrow to me, yet they are wise, and that which is most pleasant is not always the best to be done. Let us talk of them again when the others are with us, and after to-morrow night's work is done.”

“Very well,” he said. “I fully understand you, so we won't say anything more about it until then. I suppose I may tell the Professor about what we are to do to-morrow night?”

“Yes,” I said; “there will be no harm in that, since a share of the gold belongs to him as well.”

“And Hartness?”

“He knows already, for I have told him not only of the treasures in the Hall of Gold, but of many others that will be used in the work that he has sworn to do with me.”

Later on that day when the midday heat had cooled a little, I was walking alone in the garden of the hacienda, thinking deeply of what Djama had said and striving to find some plan of my own that would be as good and yet not make the parting that I dreaded needful. I turned, paying but little heed to my way, into a winding pathway shaded with trees and bordered with grass and flowers. I was looking down upon the ground as was my wont, when I heard footsteps near me and looked up. I had turned the bend in the path, and there, but a few paces from me, stood Golden Star and Ruth. I started and made a motion as though I would turn back, but Ruth immediately beckoned to me smilingly and said:

“Come and let me introduce you to your sister, Vilcaroya. I think it's time you began to be friends again. Don't you think she is looking wonderfully well and strong, and—and beautiful?”

You may think, but I cannot tell you, of all the feelings that rose up within me as I obeyed her invitation. It was the first time that I had seen Golden Star since the night that she had awakened. Nay, was it not the first time that I had seen her as a truly living woman since the night of our bridal in the Sanctuary? She was dressed in garments made after the fashion of Ruth's own, of light grey soft stuff, and on the glorious golden wealth of her hair was a broad-brimmed straw hat such as Ruth wore. Indeed, to look at them both, standing there side by side, they could but have been taken for two twin sisters, daughters of the Day and Night, as my loving fancy called them afterwards, rather than the daughters of different peoples, and children of far-parted generations, whose hands, as they clasped, bridged the gulf between one age of the world and another. As I approached, Golden Star's eyes looked at me with the simple wonder that looks out of the eyes of a little child, and like a little child she smiled at me, and then she looked at Ruth, and made a soft low sound that was almost like the cooing of a child.

“She is pleased to see you, Vilcaroya,” said Ruth, taking hold of my hand and hers, “but of course she can't say so yet. Now, let me teach her to shake hands with you.”

Then she put into mine the soft, warm, little hand that I had last clasped when we went hand in hand to the couch of our long sleep. I pressed it gently, looking at her through the tears that rose into my eyes, then I raised it to my lips and kissed it, and she smiled, and made the little soft sound again, and then Ruth put her arm round her waist and said:

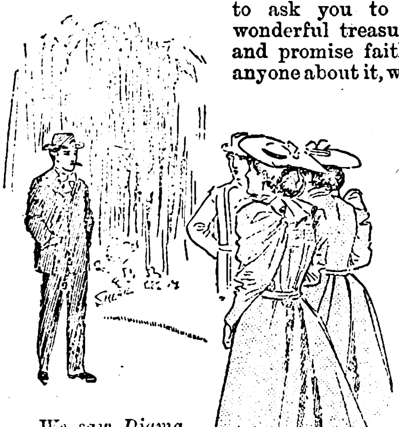
“Come now, you are acquainted, and she likes you. This will be an invaluable lesson for her. Now, let us have a walk, and you tell me the news, if there is any.”

“Most willingly,” I said, “for I have much news to tell.”

So we turned back along the path into the quietest part of the garden, I walking by Ruth's side. And I told her of all that had passed between her brother and me in the morning, and of what was to be done on the following night. She was looking very serious when I had finished, and I could see that many unspoken thoughts were working in her mind, and when I had done she looked up at me and said:

"Laurens' plan seems a very good one at first sight, but of course we cannot decide upon anything until we have thought a good deal more about it, and talked it well over amongst ourselves. But, at any rate, it would be several weeks yet before I would even think of going away with Golden Star, so there is plenty of time for that. But to-morrow night—Listen, Vilcaroya, may I ask a very great favour of you?"

"Joyful Star can ask no favour of me," I said. "She can speak and I can hear and obey."



We saw Djama walking down the path towards us.

"Nonsense, Vilcaroya, I wish you wouldn't talk like that," she answered with pretty petulance. "Now, suppose I was to ask you to let me see this wonderful treasure-house of yours and promise faithfully not to tell anyone about it, would you let me?"

"It is not the best that I can show you," I answered gladly, "but if you desire to see it, it is yours and all that it contains. I can give your brother and the Professor other gold, and I will show you a greater treasure-house than this, under the Fortress itself."

"Well," she laughed. "I won't say now that I won't have it, because the sight of all that gold might be too much for me, but I should dearly love to come and see it, and I think I might venture to bring Golden Star, too. She's quite well and strong now, and if we are careful of her it can't do her any harm, and it may do her good. Shall I bring her?"

"Yes," I said, "why not?"

At this moment we saw Djama come walking down the path towards us, and at the sight of him there came to me, like the stab of a dagger of ice, the sudden memory that, at the moment I was speaking of my treasure-house under the Sacsahuaman, I had heard a gentle rustle behind some bushes close by the path, and a sound like that of a stealthy tread.

CHAPTER XX.

A Royal Wooing.

As Djama came near to us I saw the lovelight flash into his eyes and a swift flush rise into his sallow cheeks. He held out his hand and quickened his pace, smiling as sweetly as a woman the while. I was facing him a little in advance, and I heard behind me a sharp, low, shuddering cry of terror that shook my heart as I turned to learn its cause. Golden Star had thrown her arms round Ruth's neck, and was clinging to her, trembling with fear, and looking sideways at Djama with eyes fixed and wide open with terror.

You have seen how little children will go smiling and fearless into the arms of one stranger and shrink in hate and terror from another. Their sight is keener than it is in after years, when the dust of the world's conflict has dulled it, and they can see plainly the good and the evil that is hidden behind the mask of the face. So it was with that child-soul of Golden Star's. Though I was now to her as strange as Djama, yet she had seen in me only the friend and brother who loved her and wished her well, and whose heart was clean in her sight; but in Djama she had seen at a single glance the evil that had only been revealed to me after many weeks of watching.

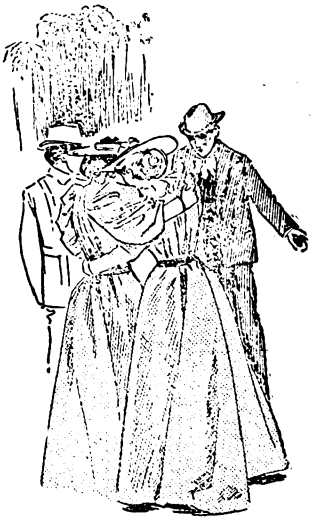
Though I hated him for the fear that he had caused her, yet I was glad also, for now I saw that the answer to his proposal would be easier than I had thought for. As for him, his face darkened and his black brows came together in a straight line across his forehead, and the lovelight in his eyes changed to a glare of anger; but this was only for an instant. It passed more quickly than the thunder clouds melt round the crest of Illampu. He stopped, and stood with his head slightly bent and his hands spread palms outwards in the posture of one who asks pardon, and said, in a voice that had no trace of anger:

"Forgive me, Ruth! I am afraid I have startled our patient—or, perhaps, I should rather say, yours, now. It was something more than stupid of me to come upon you suddenly like this without any warning. Of all people in the world I ought to have known better than that. But I suppose seeing Vilcaroya already here made me forget myself. Did she start like that when he came?"

"No," replied Ruth, still standing with her arm where she had thrown it around Golden Star's shoulders, and stroking her hair with the other. "She—she saw him farther off than you, and I took her towards him, so I suppose the shock was not so great. But please go away, both of you, now. You see she is terribly frightened, and she is trembling as though someone had struck her. I must take her into the house and get her quiet again, or the consequences may be serious."

Djama turned away without a word, his face darkening again as he did so, and with one backward glance at Golden Star, who had now raised her head from Ruth's breast, and was staring after us with fixed, wide-open eyes, I turned and walked away beside him, neither of us speaking a word, for we were both too busy with our own thoughts.

That night Francis Hartness and Tupac returned from their journey to the south, and as the Professor was also in the house I told them of what I wished done on the following night, and bade Tupac make all preparation. The next day we all started in the cool of the morning to go to the Rodadero as though for a picnic, as the people of Cuzco often do, so that there might be no suspicion of our true object. We all rode upon horses, saving Golden Star, who was carried in a hammock-litter, that I had had made for her, and Tupac, and six of our people who came with us as bearers and servants. We spent the day wandering about among the mighty ruins of the Sacsahuaman, and exploring the wonders of the carved rocks and underground passages and altar-places, which have been the marvel of every traveller to the hills about Cuzco, and all that I knew of the upper works I told my companions, and showed them as well as I could what the mighty fastness had been in the days of its undimmed pride and unbroken strength.



Stood with his head slightly bent.

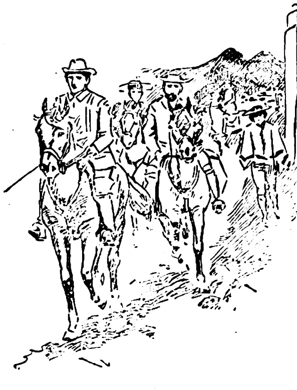
Then, when the brief twilight came, I bade one of our men take the beasts into a chamber among the rocks that I had shown him, and where plenty of fodder had been stored a few days before. After this we waited a little longer, till night fell, and then I bade Tupac do what I had bidden him the day before. His voice rose shrill and plaintive in the silence, chanting a song that you may have heard the Indians singing in Peru when returning from their labours, and presently from among the rocks, on the plain and from the shadowy lines of the fortress, many silent figures stole out and went towards the valley in which the Sayacusca stands.

Then I told my companions that all, save those of the Blood, must have their eyes bandaged, as Djama's had been before, and when they had submitted willingly to this, knowing, as they did, that no harm would come to them, we led them to the Sayacusca—I leading Ruth by the hand, and following the bearers of Golden Star's litter, and there the way to the Hall of Gold was opened as before, and we entered it, followed by a long line of the Children of the Blood.

But I made no halt here, nor did I let my companions even see the treasure that was to be divided between Djama and the Professor according to my promise, for I had greater marvels in store for them. So, lantern in hand, I led the way through a winding gallery behind the pyramid of gold of which I told you before. At the end of this was a door formed by a revolving stone similar to that at the entrance to the hall. This Tupac and another opened under my directions, and we entered a long straight passage behind it. At the end of this was a broad flight of stone steps, and at the top were two low bronze doors bolted into pillars on either side. The doors had no hinges, but they turned with the pillars, and no one who did not know this, or how the pillars turned, could open them. But this secret was one of many others that I had brought with me from the past, and in a few moments the doors were standing open before us.

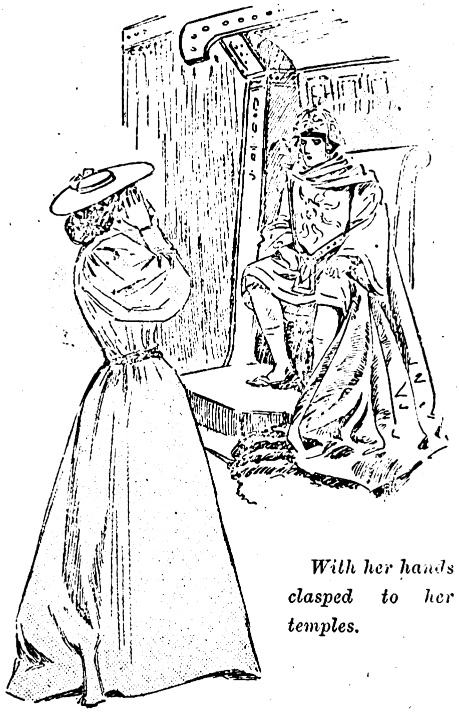
We passed in, and I closed them behind us. Two of my men had come laden with great candles and torches, and these I had lit and placed in golden sconces which stood out from the walls in the great hall into which we had passed through the bronze doors. When this had been done I beckoned to Tupac, and went silently with him to the other end of the hall, where, on a throne of gold under a canopy of silver, sat a silent figure clad in the imperial robes. It was the effigy of the great Yupanqui, father of Huayni-Capac, which had been seated here since his death as an emblem of the unbroken sovereignty of his race, and giving place in turn to his son and grandson on the days that they were crowned, and being replaced when the ceremony was over.

Now with Tupac's help I carried the effigy into a little chamber behind the throne, and there quickly removed my upper clothing and dressed myself as I had done before in the Hall of Gold, and took my place on the throne. Then I bade Tupac lead Joyful Star, with her eyes still bandaged, to me. When he had placed her before me I made a sign to him, and the bandage fell from her eyes. She turned white as death, and staggered back a pace with her hands clasped to her temples, and there she stood staring wide-eyed at me and all the splendours about her.



We all rode upon horses.

Wherever her gaze wandered it saw nothing but gold and silver and gems and rich-dyed hangings of silk and wool, whose brilliant hues no time could dim. The roof and the upper halves of the walls were covered with plates of burnished silver; around the walls, half-way between the floor and the ceiling, ran a great cornice or ledge of gold, on which stood the golden chairs in which were seated the mummies of the twenty Incas which I had last seen in the Sanctuary of the Sun, looking down through the eye-holes in their golden masks.



With her hands clasped to her temples.

From the cornice to the floor hung the bright-hued hangings, and against these were ranged along the floor on either side three score seats of silver, and the floor was paved with diamond shaped blocks of gold and silver set alternately. Behind the throne on which I sat rose from floor to roof a sloping wall of golden ingots and on either hand stood a great golden vase, heaped high with uncut gems, emeralds, and diamonds, sapphires, and rubies, precious almost beyond price, and on the roof above my throne a great golden image of the Sun, encircled by spreading rays of gems, glowed and sparkled in the light of the candles and torches.

At last Ruth's wandering gaze became steady and rested upon my face, and I looked back into her eyes, making no sign until she should speak, and sitting motionless as the effigy whose place I had taken.

"Where am I?" she said at last in a low, faint voice, like one awakening from a dream. "And who are you? Surely you cannot be—and yet, yes, you are Vilcaroya! What has happened?"

"Nothing more than the granting of Joyful Star's request, save that through the treasure-house which she asked to see I have brought her to a better one. Does it please her?"

"Is it real, Vilcaroya?" she whispered. "Is all this really gold and silver, and are these real diamonds and rubies and emeralds, or am I only dreaming? Does it please me? What a question! I have never even dreamed of anything like it. Where are we, Vilcaroya?"

"In the throne-room of the Incas, beneath what was once their palace and fortress on the hill of Sacsahuaman," I answered, "and this is the throne of the great Yupanqui, the greatest earthly king and conqueror of my race. I sat here and crowned myself Inca in the presence of Anda-Huillac and the priests and nobles of the Land of the Four Regions on the day before the night when I drank the death-draught with Golden Star."

"Ah, yes, where is she?" she cried, looking round only to see that all the rest had vanished, and she and I were alone in the great hall. "What have they done with her, and where are Laurens and the others?" she cried, looking fearfully and almost mistrustingly at me. "What have you done with them, Vilcaroya?"

"They are safe," I said. "Tupac and his men have care of them, and they will come back when I bid him bring them, but I have need of your presence here alone before I do that," I said, rising from my seat as I spoke. "Has Joyful Star ever sat on a throne?"

"No," she stammered, staring at me with wonder in her eyes. "You know I haven't. Why should you ask?"

"Then sit in mine," I said, "for I have something to say to you which I can best say and you can best hear if we change places. Nay, I will take no denial," I said, drawing her by the hand up the steps in front of the throne, "for it is not only your—your friend who is asking, but a crowned king in his own palace, who is lord of life and death over all who enter it."

Half frightened and half wondering, she submitted to my will and allowed me to seat her in the chair in which no woman had ever sat before. Then I took her hand, and, dropping on one knee on the upper step, I said:

"Joyful Star has taken one queen from me, and she alone can give me another to fill her place. She is sitting where the great Yupanqui sat when he ruled all the land from north to south and from the eastern mountains to the sea, and, ere long, I, too, shall reign, sole and undisputed lord, over a realm wider even than that. Many things have been done that Joyful Star knows not of since I came back to my country and my people. Through all the Land of the Four Regions the word has gone forth with the swiftness of thought that the Son of the Sun has returned, and that the heir of the divine Manco has come to deliver his children from bondage.*

"Everywhere the tidings have been received with joy, and the people are longing to return to the allegiance of their fathers, and tread their oppressors under foot. Before many days civil war will be raging throughout the lands of the south, and I have but to set flowing that golden stream, one of whose many sources is here, and say: 'Here is gold and silver in plenty for all who will fight under the Rainbow Banner,' and I shall have armies and fleets to do what I will with, and the sway of my sceptre shall reach from north to south and sea to sea.

"This I shall do because of my oath, but I have brought Joyful Star here to tell her, in the most sacred place that is left in the Land of the Four Regions, that I shall also do it so that she, if she will, may be queen where I am king, and sit beside me on my throne, and make my empire a paradise by the brightness and the sweetness of her presence. I cannot forget, as she bade me do, for the words that I said in the heat of my passion are true—for I love you, Joyful Star, and all that I have or shall ever have on earth can have no worth for me unless you take it as a gift from my hands. Nay, do not speak, for now I seek no answer, whether good or evil. I have brought you here that I, as a king, might kneel at the feet of her whom I would win for my queen, and from now until I sit in the sight of all the world on the throne of the Four Regions, no other words of love shall pass my lips. So you shall have many days to ponder what I have said, and to ask your own heart whether it will say 'yes' or 'no' to me when I stretch out my hand from my throne and ask you to come and sit beside me and rule my people with me."

Before she could answer I stood up and clapped my hands, and Tupac with six others, dressed now in the forbidden costume of their ancestors, entered the hall from the ante-chamber, into which they had taken the others, and came towards me bearing wands across their shoulders in token of homage, and with heads downbent, not daring to look upon my majesty till I bade them. I drew Joyful Star from the throne by the hand, and seating myself in it, said in the ancient tongue:

"Let the Children of the Blood enter into the presence of their father and their lord, and let the strangers be brought in and the other maiden, all with eyes bandaged, and let seats of silver be placed to the right and left of the throne, one for each of the Virgins of the Sun to sit upon. Are all things else ready, Tupac-Rayca?"

"Yes, lord," he answered, stepping out in front of the others and falling on his knees, "and the Children of the Blood are waiting to see the glory of thy presence and hear the words of wisdom and hope from thy lips."

(To be continued.)

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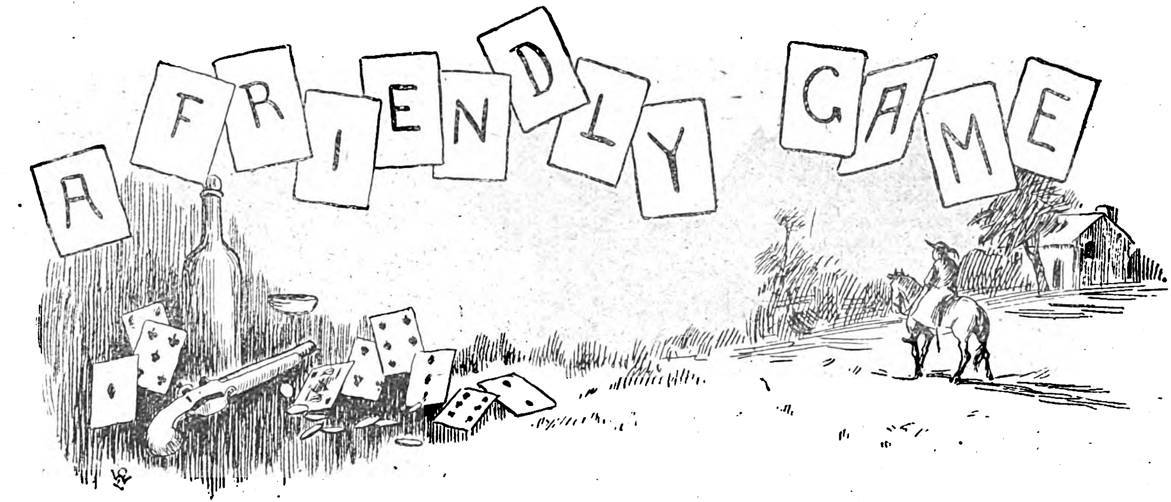
* The Inca Indians of the Sierra region possess the same extraordinary faculty of transmitting intelligence without apparent material means that the Hindoos and the Arabs have. Thus, during the recent revolution in Peru, the fall of Lima was known to the Indians of Bolivia on the Southern shore of Lake Titicaca three days after it happened, though the telegraph wires were cut and all ordinary communications suspended. Without the telegraph this would be quite impossible by any means known to Europeans.

A FRIENDLY GAME



At the close of a short winter's day in the year 1649 a solitary horseman jogged along across Hounslow Heath, the reins of the well-bred mare he bestrode hanging carelessly on her neck. They understood each other well, these two, and it would have needed but a word and a touch of the rein or the slightest pressure of her rider's heel to cause her to stop motionless as a statue, or to break into a swinging gallop which would soon put a good many miles between her and any one that might attempt to follow, as she had more than once proved to her owner's entire satisfaction.

She was, in fact, possessed of a remarkably fine turn of speed, and when to this was added an almost human intelligence it is not to be wondered at that between her owner—a gentleman of the road—and herself there existed a very close bond of affection.

"The rascal must have misled me, I suppose, and her ladyship's coach has gone by," was the man's comment, as after waiting for more than an hour in the shade of some pine trees on the edge of the heath his vigil had not been rewarded as he had hoped it would have been by the sound of rumbling wheels denoting the approach of a posting vehicle, such as the quality were wont to travel in in the days when Cromwell's soldiers were considerably in evidence all over the country. This fact was well known to the bold highwayman, who, from his invariable courtesy to those with whom he had "business" relations, had earned the soubriquet of Gentleman Dick, and it is with him that this story has to do.

As he left the confines of the heath and made his way towards Staines, he was careful to see that the priming of his pistols was right, and he kept a watchful eye for any unwelcome individual that might be about.

As good luck would have it, he was not accosted until he had reached his destination, an old-fashioned hostelry on the outskirts of the town, with a considerable range of stabling attached. The mare evidently knew her way, and having halted of her own accord outside a comfortable loose box, her rider quickly dismounted and led her in; and then, with the bit out of her mouth but with the bridle left on, so as to be ready for an emergency, she was soon busily feeding out of a well-filled manger, which seemed to imply that her advent was not altogether unexpected by the owner of the establishment.

Having seen to her wants, Gentleman Dick did not, as might have been expected, boldly swagger up to the front door, but contented himself by entering the house from the back, and, saluting the landlord in a familar way, asked who was about.

"Only a couple of parsons, in there," jerking his thumb in the direction of the inn parlour. "They came in an hour ago, and from the look of their nags they have come a goodish way."

Gentleman Dick made a wry face; members of the cassock fraternity were not much in his line.

"They've as pretty a pair of nags as you'd see in a day's journey," was the landlord's remark.

"Come now, that's something," was the reply. "Oh, landlord, bring me in a bottle of your best," he said aloud, as he opened the parlour door and walked in.

The room was a blaze of light, as in addition to a goodly array of candles there was a roaring wood fire on the hearth, and standing with their backs thereto were two men, both dressed alike in the garb of Presbyterian ministers, but otherwise presenting a marked contrast to each other, the one being tall and spare with a white flowing beard, the other not much more than a boy, with a clean shaven face and a prematurely bald head.

Gentleman Dick had ever been noted for his courtesy to all he met, and it was with the best bow that he could command that he saluted the two men, and remarked that it was a lonesome neighbourhood, and they had done well to put up for the night, instead of pushing on to Windsor. That this should have been their destination was of course purely imaginary on his part, but he liked, as he always said, to know as much as possible.

"We have travelled far to-day, my son and I, sir," with a glance at the younger man, "and our nags, although good animals, are tired, otherwise we should have pressed onwards, late as the hour is."

"Have you no fear of highwaymen?"

"Our trust is in the Lord, and we have never yet been overcome by one of his enemies, either mounted or afoot."

"Well spoken, sir, but maybe you have never met with a man of much determination. They say Gentleman Dick, the highwayman, of whom you may have heard, is on the road in these parts, and he is no respecter of persons, I have heard."

Whilst he had been speaking he had been divesting himself of his sword and pistols, laying the latter down on the table before him so as to have them near at hand. As he did so his eye fell upon the travellers' saddles and riding-cloaks, out of the pocket of one of which protruded the butt-end of a pistol.

"You carry arms, I observe," he remarked with a smile.

"We do, sir. In these troublous times it is well to be prepared; but by the Lord's help I trust neither my son nor I may ever have need to use them, unless it be that the enemy seem bent on our destruction."

"A godly sentiment, which does you credit, sir. Ha! that's better, landlord," as the latter appeared with the wine.

"Now, gentlemen, you'll do me the honour of drinking with me."

The elder man seemed inclined to refused the invitation; but the younger one showed unmistakable signs of satisfaction at the proffered hospitality, and his scruples, if any, vanished.

"We are not much given to wine drinking, sir; but since you are good enough to invite us to share your liquor, it would be churlish to refuse. I am not much in love with it myself, but my son likes a glass in moderation."

"That's better. Here's to the King! God bless him!"

If there had been any signs of diffidence on the parsons' part hitherto, they speedily vanished under the cheering influence of the bottle, and the elder man became quite garrulous by the time a second one had made its appearance, and, from what he let drop, it appeared they had come from the South of England.

"Now, gentlemen, what do you say to a game of cards? I'm in the humour for it, and you won't baulk me of my pleasure, I hope," at the same time carelessly fingering one of the pistols before him.

"In truth, sir, it's not lack of will on my part, but of knowledge, believe me—I know not one card from another. Such diversions were not held to be lawful for men of my calling in my younger days, and, in faith, as the strength of the wine seems to have got into my head, not being accustomed thereto, I will, with your permission, snatch a hasty repose;" and he prepared to make himself comfortable on the settle.

"So be it, sir, then; but surely your son will not deprive me of an hour's amusement? 'Tis not long, I take it, since you left college, young sir, and whatever it may have been in your father's time, card-playing is not considered a venial offence nowadays, I'm thinking."

"Indeed, sir, and nothing would please me more than to give you a game, poor player that I am; but I passed my word to my father, when I left college awhile ago, never to touch a card again, and I have kept my word so far."

The old man, who had apparently dozed off, woke up at the sound of his name.

"What the lad says is true enough, sir, but in return for your kindness I will withdraw my injunction for this one occasion; but one thing I would ask of you, and that is to let your stakes be moderate, as becomes our position. You, sir, will, I know, pardon me, for we are but poor men, and cannot afford to wager highly. You will find a bag with some few gold pieces in my saddle-bag, Joseph——"

"Far be it from me, sir, to encourage the vice of gambling, and we will confine ourselves to modest stakes—just enough to give an interest to the game," at the same time cocking the two pistols that lay convenient to his hand. The old man gave a start at the ominous sound, and his son did not seem to be altogether at ease, to judge by the expression of his face.

"Let us have a clean pack, landlord, and bring in another bottle."

"Your deal, young sir," as, handing the cards to his opponent, he took a copious draught of wine, his left hand at the same moment toying with one of his pistols, as if mechanically.

The old gentleman seated on the settle at the back of the highwayman was already snoring placidly, and, noticing it, the son, after looking towards him to make sure, suggested in a low tone that they might as well play for a gold piece a time, adding that if he lost many he would have to leave off playing.

"With all my heart, and I hope fortune may smile upon you; you won't find me a bad loser."

For a time the game went evenly enough, first one and then the other gaining a slight advantage, until at length the young parson, who had evidently acquired confidence, and handled his cards with more dexterity as the time went on, suggested—somewhat eagerly, as it appeared to Gentleman Dick—that they should double the stakes.

"With all my heart, young sir," was the hearty response.

For a while the game went all against the younger man, and then, as will sometimes happen, the luck suddenly changed, and the heap of gold pieces in front of Master Joseph assumed goodly proportions. Still the highwayman continued to play his game in his usual easy-going style. Whereas it was noticeable, or would have been had there been anybody to see it, that his opponent took considerable pains and deliberation as to how he played his cards.

Indeed, on one occasion, after he had been nursing his clean-shaved chin with his left hand, after the manner of some players when in doubt, he looked across the table and caught Gentleman Dick's eye fixed upon him in a way he did not like apparently, as he speedily played a card which, as it happened, lost him the game. Almost at the same moment it certainly seemed as if the old gentleman asleep on the settle momentarily opened one eye; but so swiftly was it done that it would have been impossible to say with certainty.

"What say you, sir, will you double the stakes again?" The suggestion emanated from the highwayman this time, and as he made it he moved his position slightly—possibly he felt the fire too much at his back—the result being that he was able to simultaneously keep an eye on his opponent and the old parson on the settle.

"Another bottle, landlord—and you might throw a log or two on the fire at the same time."

Presently the landlord returned with the wine, and was in the act of replenishing the fire, when——

"No, you don't," shouted the highwayman, at the same time covering his opponent with one pistol, and the old sleeping clergyman with the other. For a man who had been snoring a moment before, the alacrity with which the latter sat bolt upright was something marvellous. At the same time his hand reached forward for his pistol. "Move hand or foot and I fire, you understand. Now, landlord, just take their pistols and hand up those saddle-bags. Parsons who can stake five and ten gold pieces a time can't be so very hard up. Unless I'm much mistaken, you're nothing better than a pair of rascally card-sharpers, and no more parsons than your humble servant, Gentleman Dick."

"Confound me if I didn't think as much!" muttered the elder man, with a scowl of rage; "but the young fool thought he knew better than I did."

"Confound yourself, you old idiot! Didn't you give me the word yourself?"

"You're right, let's say no more, it's no use arguing; besides, we're all of a kidney, after all."

"You'll pardon me, but I don't go in for card-sharping—I'm on the road like a gentleman should be, and what I do is fair, square, and above board. Parsons, too! A nice state of things it has come to; we shall have a judge in his carriage doing the heath next, I suppose!"

"It ain't such a bad game for a change, I can tell you; things were getting a bit too hot for us round town, and so we rigged ourselves like this, and went down Exeter way for a change, but I have had pretty near enough of it, I can tell you. The living is right enough, best of everything, and plenty of it, but you must forswear liquor like poison, and it was not being used to it that spoilt the game to-night. We have not had what you may call a fill of liquor since we've been on the lay, and when you asked us to crack a bottle it was a Godsend. We made a good haul, though, a day or two ago, and were going to return to the road again, like yourself. We've had enough of this philandering. See, now you've caught us fair and square, let's share out our lot—and it's a tidy bit, I can tell you—and cry quits."

"I'm not used to consort with low blackguards of your class, and if that fool of a son of yours—son, indeed!—hadn't been clumsy enough to try and cheat me—in my own house, too, egad!—you might have got clear away, for nobody can ever say that Gentleman Dick ever did a dirty action yet; and if he had won my money fair and square he should have been welcome to it, but to try and cheat me, and in such a clumsy way, too—bah! you aren't fit to be on the road either. Footpad work is more in your line, I'm thinking. Now then, just stand up in that corner, and if you move so much as a finger, either of you, I'll shoot you down where you stand."

"Now, landlord, open those bags out."

The landlord willingly did as he was bid, and speedily brought to light a miscellaneous collection of personal effects in the way of clothing, wigs, etc., and finally two leather bags, the one filled with broad gold pieces, and the other containing a valuable assortment of jewellery.

The two men looked sullenly on, realising the game was up, neither saying a word.

"And where did you make this haul, sirrah?"

"It was all along of a marrying job. Ha, ha!" with an attempt to pass it off lightly; but the laugh died away on seeing the look of disgust on the highwayman's face.

"A rich squire's daughter was be married to an Exeter merchant, and as my son and I were to perform the cermony, who so fit as we to escort her and her fat old mother into——"

"You mean hounds!" thundered Gentleman Dick, "and you took advantage of your position to rob two defenceless ladies. Take off every garment you have got on your degraded carcases." The men silently obeyed. "And now that flowing beard and both your wigs. A nice-looking pair of rascals, on my conscience!" And truth to say, the transformation revealed as evil-looking, hang-dog a pair of individuals as one would meet in a day's journey.

"Make a bonfire of that toggery, landlord—at any rate the road will be safe for a time from any such canting humbugs as parsons in disguise—and now put all that stuff in my saddle-bags. Share, indeed! not a stiver will you have, and you may think yourselves lucky to get off with whole skins. And now, tell me, where does this lady live? I shall make it my duty to restore her personal property to her without delay, and if I find you used any violence——"

"No, no," whined the elder man, who had been the spokesman throughout; "you couldn't have done it more tenderly yourself."

"You may thank your lucky stars for that."

The landlord reappeared with the announcement the mare was ready, and anxiously asked: "What about these rogues' nags? They're a pair of good 'uns."

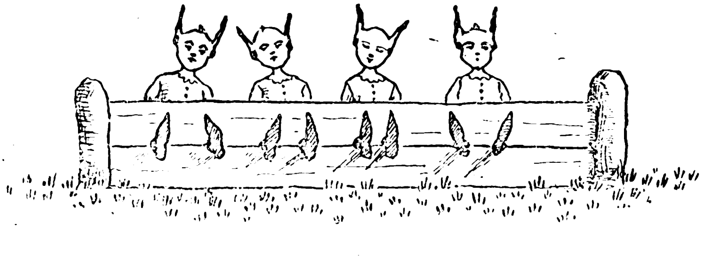
"Keep 'em, they'll pay for their score; and padding the hoof is more in their line, I'm thinking, than horseback."

"Now, remember, when a gentleman asks you to play a friendly game of cards, it is as well not to be too clever."

A minute later the clattering hoofs of the black mare announced his departure.

A day or two later the squire's daughter duly received back her jewellery, with a courteous expression of regret at being obliged to retain the coin for personal expenditure.

S. J. F. Newbery.



LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

No. 2.—Crawfish Jim.

"Did I ever tell you the story of the death of Crawfish Jim?"

The old cattleman bent upon me an eye of benevolent inquiry. I assured him that thus far the details of the taking off of Crawfish Jim had been as a sealed book to me. But I would gladly listen.

"What's the matter with laying bare the fate of Crawfish Jim right now?" I asked, falling somewhat into my old companion's style to please him.

"Nuthin' the matter," rejoined the old cattleman, "nuthin' whatever. It was this way: Crawfish Jim was a sheepman, and had a camp in the foothills o' the Tres Hermanas—mebbe thirty miles back from Wolfville. This yere Crawfish Jim was a peculiar person; plumb locoed, like all sheepmen. They has to be crazy or they wouldn't pester 'round in no sech disrepootable pursoots as sheep.

"You've seen these yere men as makes pets of snakes Mebbe it's one in a thousand times you tracks up on sech a man. Snakes is kittens to him, an' he's likely to be packin' a few specimens 'round in his clothes any time.

"Well, that's the way with this yere Crawfish Jim. I minds talkin' to him at his camp one day when I was huntin' a bunch o' cattle. The first I notices a snake sticks its head outen Crawfish's shirt, an' looks at me malevolent an' distroostful. Another sticks its nose out up by Crawfish's collar.

"'Which you shore seems ha'nted by snakes,' I says, steppin' back an' p'intin' at the reptiles.

"'Them's my dumb companions,' says Crawfish Jim. 'They shares my solitoode an' loves me.'

"'You do seem some pop'lar with 'em,' I observes, for I notes at once he's clean off his mental reservation; an' when a man's locoed it makes him hostile if you deride his little game or buck his notions.

"I takes dinner with Crawfish Jim that same day; pretty good grub, too; mainly sheep-meat, salt hoss, an' bakin'-powder biscuit. I watches him some narrow about these snakes he's 'fested with; I loathed o' 'em nacheral, an' not wantin' 'em to transfer no love to me, an' go to enlivening my solitoode. Well, son, this yere Crawfish Jim is same as a den of sarpents. I reckons now he has a plumb dozen stowed away in his raiment. Thar was no harm in 'em; bein' all bull-snakes, which is innocuous an' without p'isen, fangs, or convictions.

"When Crawfish gets ready to bile coffee he tumbles the biggest bull-snake I'd seen yet outen the coffee-pot on to the grass. Then he fills the kittle up with water, dumps in the coffee, an' sets her on the coals to stew.

"'This yere particular snake,' says Crawfish, 'which, by the way, I calls him Julius Cæsar, is too big to to't 'round in my shirt, an' so he lives in the coffee-pot while I'm away, and keeps camp for me.'

"'Don't you have no rattlesnakes to fondle some?' I inquires, jest to see what card he'd play.

"'No,' he says, 'rattlesnakes is all right — good, sociable, moral snakes enough—but they may bite you in jokes, or something like that, an' thar you be. No; bull snakes is as 'fectionate as rattlers, an' don't run to p'isen. You don't have no accidents with 'em.'

"'Can't you burst the fangs outen rattlesnakes?' I says.

"'They grows right in again,' says Crawfish, 'same as your finger nails. I ain't got no time to go through a rattlesnake's mouth every day lookin' up teeth, so I don't worry none with 'em, but jest plays bull-snakes straight. This yere bein' dentist for rattlesnakes has risks, which the same would be foolish to assoom.'

"While grub's cookin' an' Crawfish an' me's pow-wowin', a little old dog Crawfish has—one of these yere no-account office dogs—comes up an' makes a small uprisin' off to one side with Julius Cæsar. The dog yelps an' snaps, an' Julius Cæsar blows an' strikes at him, same as a rattlesnake. However, they ain't doin' no harm, an' Crawfish don't pay no heed.

"'They're jest runnin' blazers on each other,' says Crawfish, 'an' don't mean nothin'. Bimeby Caribou Jim, which the same is the dog, 'll go lie down an' sleep; an' Julius will quile up agin' him to be warm. Caribou Jim bein' a dog that way, is a warm-blood animal, while pore Julius has got cold blood like a fish. So he goes over an' camps on Caribou, an' all the same puts his feet on him for to be comfortable.'

"Of course, I'm a heap interested in this yere snake knowledge, an' tells Crawfish so. But it sorter gets my appetite, an' Crawfish saves on sheep-meat an' salt hoss by his discourse powerful. Thinkin' an' a-lookin' at them blessed snakes—especial at Julius Cæsar—I shore ain't hungry much. But, as you says, how about Crawfish Jim's getting killed?

"One day Crawfish allows all alone by himse'f he'll hop into Wolfville an' buy some stuff for his camp—flour, whiskey, tebacker, airtights, an' sech. What's airtights? Which your Eastern folks is shore ignorant. Airtights is can peaches, can tomatters, an' similar bluffs.

"Well, as I'm sayin', 'long comes pore old Crawfish over to Wolfville; rides in on a burro. That's right, son; comes loafin' 'long on a burro. These yere sheepmen is that abandoned and vulgar they ain't got pride to ride a hoss. 'Long comes Crawfish on a burro. An' it's his first visit to Wolfville. Heretofore the old

Cimmaron goes over to Red Dog for his plunder, the same bein' a low-down camp on the Lordsburg trail, which allows it's a rival to Wolfville. It ain't, however, the same, not bein' of the same commercial importance as a prairie-dog town.

"This yere time Crawfish p'ints up for Wolfville. An' to make himse'f loved, I reckon, whatever does this yere old Big horn do but bring 'long Julius Cæsar?

"I don't reckon now he'd ever played Julius Caesar none on Red Dog. Mighty likely this was the bull-snake's first engagement. I clings to this notion that Red Dog never see Julius Cæsar, for if she had them drunkards which inhabit said camp wouldn't have quit yellin' yet. Which Julius Cæsar with that Red Dog whiskey they was soaked in would have shore given strange visions. Fact is, Crawfish told Jack Moore later he never took Julius Cæsar nowhar before.

"But all the same Crawfish prances into camp on this yere occasion with Julius Cæsar bushwhacked 'way 'round back in his shirt, an' sech vacant spaces about his person as ain't otherwise 'gaged a-nourishin' of minor bull-snake's plenty profuse. Of course these snakes is all holdin' back, bein', after all, timid cattle, an' so none of us suspects Crawfish is packin' any sech surprises. None of the boys 'bout town knows o' Crawfish havin' this bull-snake habit but me, nohow. So the old man stampedes 'round an' buys what he's arter, an' all goes well. Nobody ain't even dreamin' of reptiles.

"At last Crawfish, havin' turned his little game for flour, airtights, an' jug-juice, as I says, gets into the Red Light saloon, an' braces up ag'in the bar an' calls for p'ints all 'round. This yere is only proper an' p'lite, an' everybody within hearin' o' the yell lines up.

"It's at this yere crisis Crawfish Jim starts in to make himse'f a gineral fav'rite. Everybody's slopped out his perfoomery, an' Dan Boggs is jest sayin':

"'Yere's lookin' at ye, Crawfish.'

"Then that crazy-hos sheper' sorter swarms 'round inside his shirt with his hand for a moment, an' then lugs out Julius Cæsar by the scruff o' his neck, a-squirmin' an' a-blowin', and madder'n a drunken squaw. Once he gets Julius out, he lays him on the Red Light bar an' sorter herds him 'round with his hand to keep Julius from chargin' off among the bottles.

"'Gents,' says this yere locoed Crawfish, 'I ain't no boaster, but I offers 100 to 50, an' make it up to 1,000 dollars in wool or sheep, Julius Cæsar is the fattest an' finest sarpent in Arizona; also the best behaved.'

"There warn't no one takin' Crawfish's bet. The moment he slams Julius Cæsar on the bar, more'n ten of our leadin' citizens falls to the floor in fits, an' simply emerges outen one par'xism to slump into another. Which we shorely had a gineral round of all sorts of spells.

"'Whativer's the matter of you-all people?' says Crawfish, lookin' some aghast. 'Thar's no more harm in Julius Cæsar than if he was a full blown rose.'

"Jack Moore being marshal, o' course, stands his hand. It's his official dooty to play a pat hand on bull-snakes an' danger in any form. An' Jack does it. While Crawfish is busy recountin' the virtues of Julius Cæsar, a-holdin' of his pet with one hand, Jack Moore takes a snap-shot at him along the bar with his six-shooter, an' away goes Julius Cæsar's head like a puff of smoke. Then Moore rounds up Crawfish, an' perceivin' of the other bull-snakes, he searches 'em out one by one an' massacres 'em.

"'Call over Doctor Peets,' says Jack Moore final, 'an' bring Boggs an' Tutt, an' the rest of these yere invalids to.'

"Doc. Peets an' Enright both trails in on the lope from the store. They hears Moore's gun play, an' is curious, nacheral enough, to know who calls it. Well, they turns in an' brings the other inhabitants outen their fits; pendin' which Moore goes on an' kills off the last remainin' bull-snake in Crawfish's herd.

"Son, I've seen people mad, an' I've seen 'em sorry, an' I've seen 'em bit by grief. But I'm yere to remark I never runs up on a fellow bein' who goes plum mad with sadness until I sees Crawfish that day Jack Moore immolates his bull-snake pets. He stands thar white an' ain't sayin' a word. Looks for a minute like he can't move. Crawfish don't pack no gun, or I allers reckoned we'd heard of him while them bull-snakes was cashin' in.

"But at last he sorter comes to, an' walks out without sayin' nothin'. They ain't none of us noticin' o' him much at the time, bein' busy recoverin' from the gineral shock with whiskey.

"Now, what do you s'pose this yere old Navajo does? Lopes straight over to th' store—is ca'm as a June day about it, too—an' buys a six-shooter.

"The next notice we gets of Crawfish, bang goes his new gun, an' the bullet cuts along Jack Moore's head about two feet too high for results. New gun that away; an' Crawfish not up on his practice; o' course, he overshoots.

"Well, the poor old murderer never gets a second shot. I reckon eight men shot all at once, an' Crawfish Jim quits this earthly deal unanimous. He stops every bullet, eight of 'em, like I says.

"Thar wasn't a man of us don't feel regrets; but what's the use? Thar we was up against a deal with Crawfish clean locoed, an' thar wasn't no other waggon track out.

"'I shore hope he's on the hot trail of them bull-snakes of his'n,' says Dan Boggs, as we lays Crawfish out on a card table. 'Seems like he thought monstrous of 'em. An' it would mighty likely please him to run up on 'em whar he's gone.'

"Whatever did we do? Why, we digs a grave out back of the dance hall, an' plants tharein Crawfish an' his pets.

"'I reckon we'd better bury the reptiles, too,' says Doc. Peets, jest as we got Crawfish stretched out all comfortable in the bottom. 'If he's lookin' down on these obsequies it'll make him feel easier.' Doc. Peets was mighty pensive an' sentimental an' romantic that away, an' allers thinks of sech like touchin' things to do.

"We counted in the snakes. There was eleven of 'em besides Julius Cæsar, which we lays him on Crawfish's breast. You can go to Wolfville an' find the grave to-day. Shore! we sticks up a headboard. It says on it, the same bein' furnished by Doc. Peets—an' I wants to say Doc. Peets was the best eddicated man in Arizona—as follows:

"'Sacred to the Memory of
CRAWFISH JIM, JULIUS CÆSAR,
and
Eleven other Bull-Snakes.
They Meant Well,
But they Misunderstood Existence and Died.
This Board was Reared by an
Admiring Circle of Friends,
Who was with Deceased to the Last.'"

A Daughter of Corsica

THE two men sprang simultaneously to their feet.

"You are a liar!"

"A what, sir?"

"A liar!"

"Then take that," and the young Englishman accompanied his words with a blow that sent the Corsican reeling backwards.

Gill Jackson was the son of a wealthy English merchant who had died three months before, leaving the whole of his property to his only child, a young man of twenty-five, who had chosen perhaps the most pleasurable method of killing time by starting on a journey round the world.

From Paris, of which he had tired in a week, he proceeded to Marseilles, and from there to Corsica.

And so, a month after leaving his home, Gill found himself gazing upon the citron and orange groves of the Campoloro, and listening to the dull, monotonous roar of the Govona torrent.

Of the natural beauties of the island, however, he soon grew weary, and the brilliantly lighted casinos of the town attracted him far more than the sweet-smiling chestnut woods which covered the lower slopes of the Monte del Oro.

At Ajaccio he fell in with a young American, a Daniel Freemore, who, too, was engaged in killing time by the same means as himself.

Jackson and Freemore saw a great deal of one another, and one evening, over a glass of absinthe, the latter waxed confidential to such a degree that he imparted to the young Englishman full particulars concerning his love affairs.

He was deeply in love with a young Corsican maiden, he explained; but unfortunately the parents and brother of the girl were most strongly adverse to the union.

The lady was of a family in whose veins ran the blood of the house of Leubo, a noble family of long standing regarded with profound respect and esteem by every one.

Marina's parents he had but seldom seen. He was an American, and his very presence was objectionable to them. Her brother he had never had an opportunity of meeting.

Although the girl loved him, she dared not disgrace the name of her noble family by accompanying him to America in opposition to the commands of her parents.

And so Freeman came to Jackson for advice, and the young Englishman gave it as his opinion that the best course to pursue would be for the ardent lover to journey to the girl's parents, who lived a few miles from the town, boldly telling them that, if they refused to allow the marriage to take place, he would carry off their daughter.

This advice Daniel thought reasonable, and so the following day he left the town.

The same night that he set out Gill entered one of the numerous cafés which abound in the streets of Ajaccio, and threw himself into a lounge at a vacant table.

Shortly after, a young Corsican, dressed in the uniform of a French naval officer, entered the room, and sat on the opposite side of the table.

Cheroots were exchanged, and the topics of the day freely discussed between the two men, who, until this moment, had been unknown to one another.

From one subject to another the conversation passed, until the momentous question of the relative strengths of the British and French navies arose.

Scarcely five minutes elapsed before the two men were engaged in hot dispute, which resulted in the Corsican calling the Englishman a liar, and the next instant finding himself rolling on the ground.

The café was crowded, and further trouble prevented. But before leaving the room, a meeting was arranged between the two men.

Preliminary arrangements were made for the duel by the Corsican's seconds and Daniel Freemore, who had returned elated with success, only to find his acquaintance preparing to engage in a duel.

The action was to take place in an open part of the beautiful woods of Monte del Oro, half a mile from the town.

Until the moment when the company met, Freemore had not seen his principal's adversary, nor had he taken any particular notice of his name.

Now, however, as he stood close to the Corsican, the latter's features appeared familiar to him. Gradually it dawned upon him that the young officer remarkably resembled the fair Marina both in face and voice.

In a moment he called to mind the name of this man. It was Matteo Leubo, his betrothed's brother!

The men are in their places. The American is dazed. He cannot see. He would avert the duel, but it is an affair of honour. A cloud passes over his eyes, and he leans against a tree for support. Then the reports of the pistols ring out simultaneously.

The Englishman staggers; the Corsican falls.

Gill Jackson has received a flesh wound in the arm; but Matteo is dead!

* * * * * *

Nearly a twelvemonth elapsed, and Gill Jackson, having continued his tour, found himself in due course travelling through the States.

During his journey he fell desperately in love with a beautiful creole, who with her parents resided in Louisiana.

The father of this lovely girl, Michael Poindexter, at once favourably impressed by the bearing of this handsome young Englishman, did all in his power to favour the suit, with the result that before many weeks had passed Gill Jackson and the fair Louise were engaged.

Scarcely, however, had their future happiness been assured than dark rumours filled the air of the coming strife between North and South.

The black and gloomy storm-cloud, which had been gathering in strength and density for several months, burst suddenly over the heads of the thousands who fell in the deadly struggle which followed.

The Federal troops were quickly mobilised, and the Southern planter dropped his lash and handled his trusty rifle, while he gathered in his retainers, and barricaded the old home in preparation for the deadly fight around it which he too fully anticipated must sooner or later take place.

And so Gill Jackson joined the ranks of the confederates, and bidding adieu to his betrothed, advanced to repel the men whom he had learned during his stay in the South to thoroughly despise and hate.

Naturally, it was no patriotic motive that led him to take up arms; it was simply and solely because Louise had wished it.

A fortnight elapsed, and at the end of that time Gill found himself encamped with his regiment half a mile from a spot on which a little later took place one of the most bloody and desperate engagements that occurred during the whole of this wretched campaign.

Two nights before the battle, Gill paced up and down a grassy slope on sentry-go. The night was raw and cheerless, and the drizzly rain which fell made the duty of those on guard one of the most arduous.

In the distance out before him over the plain the bivouac fires of the Federal troops twinkled and glistened in the darkness, while in his rear lay the camp of the grey-coated Southerners.

At last, tired and heavy with sleep, he rested his head on his musket and dozed.

Suddenly he springs erect. There is a gentle rustling in the bushes close at hand. Simply a twig snapped; but it was sufficient to wake him whose ears were ever on the elert, even in sleep.

He challenges. But only the wind moans fitfully through the stunted trees hard by. He listens intently. Ah! He is sure of it now. He peers into the darkness, grasping his bayoneted rifle, and bending forward, he catches sight of a man's figure crouching low on the ground. Again a challenge. This time the new-comer speaks, softly and hesitatingly.

"Is that you, Jackson?"

The sentry starts. The question is repeated. Then the Confederate answers.

"Yes. Who are you?" He is still prepared to resist an attack. The figure rises from the ground and advances slowly. Gill can see that the man is unarmed. At least, his hands are free.

"I am Daniel Freemore."

Jackson does not remember the name. He says so.

"I was at Ajaccio more than a year ago."

Then the sentry recollects all. He lowers the point of his bayonet and holds out his hand.

"This is a strange place to meet after so long a time."

"It is," replied Freemore.

"How on earth did you come to know of my existence here?"

"We get to know some curious things over there," remarked the American significantly, pointing over his shoulders towards the Northern camp.

"Doubtless. But I'm glad to see you, old fellow," continued Jackson, only half enthusiastically; for he was beginning to doubt the identity of the man.

"Probably. But I cannot stay here bandying. I came to you on business, Jackson, and my time is short." He glanced towards the east, where the dim luminosity in the sky showed that the day was breaking, although it was still dark. "Yes," he continued, "I want a little information concerning the position of your troops, and so on. Just a little exclusive information you know," he added, smiling grimly as he spoke.

Jackson flushed angrily. Here before him was a spy. Plainly it was his duty to capture him. But then this man claimed to be his friend. The questions flashed through his brain, what kindness had Freemore shown to him when in Corsica? None. What benefits had he derived from this man's acquaintance? None. True, he had spent many a jolly evening with Freemore, but nothing had occurred to weld them in a bond of friendship. He had been merely a passing acquaintance.

Freemore seemed to guess his thoughts.

"It's not a bit of use your touching me," he said significantly. "It will be the worse for you in the long run, depend upon it."

"How do you mean?" asked Jackson.

"I have news that will astonish you."

"I want no astonishing news," replied the Englishman hotly, advancing to lay hands on the Federal.

"Stand off, I say! Listen. Who do you think is yonder?" he continued, pointing in the direction of the distant watch-fires.

"I don't care a hang. You are my prisoner," and again he attempted to lay hold of the Northerner.

"Louise is in the camp," spoke the latter calmly.

Gill stopped; his heart beat fast. The next moment he thought the man was hoaxing him in order to effect his escape. How could Louise possibly be in the camp of the Federlas when he left her not three weeks since safely ensconced in her Southern home? How, too, did the American even know of her existence? Still more marvellous was it that he should know of her connection with him. These questions passed quickly through his throbbing brain, and at length he asked:

"In Heaven's name speak. What do you mean?"

"Simply that Louise Poindexter, your betrothed, is a prisoner in our camp."

Then he proceeded to relate how the house of Michael Poindexter had been fired, and the old man killed, and how his daughter had been carried off. How by chance he found out that she was the lover of his old friend, Gill Jackson, and how he had pledged her his word of honour to do all in his power to discover the whereabouts of her lover.

In this, he continued, he thought he had been fairly successful, and as a slight return for his service she hoped the Englishman would not hesitate to give him the information he so much required.

Jackson was as pale as death. Within his breast raged a fearful combat between love and duty.

He was but human, and after a few moment's silence he spoke slowly and in measured tones.

"I am willing to give you what information lies in my power, on condition that you undertake to enable Louise Poindexter to escape from your camp, and to come to me here, by to-morrow night."

"I will agree to these terms," replied the American, after a pause. "To-morrow night, at this hour, you will hear a jackal bark. You will whistle three times. That shall be the signal. Louise will be dressed in a long cloak, and she will approach you in the same manner that I have done. Now let me have what I want to know, and quickly, too."

He drew out a note-book and scribbled down the replies which the half-dazed Jackson made to his questions. This accomplished, he thrust the book into his pocket, and held out his hand.

"Good-bye. She shall be here to-morrow night."

"You swear it?"

"On my oath. Farewell."

He disappeared into the darkness. The bugle sounded in the Confederate camp, and Jackson was relieved at his post.

The following night he strode up and down on the little hillock, and impatiently waited for the moment when he should once more embrace the girl he loved.

As the time for the meeting drew near, he ceased his wearisome walk and leant upon his rifle.

Far behind him the Confederates are deep in slumber, and one by one the bivouac fires have died out. Now there is not a sound save the soughing of the night wind as it rises and falls across the plain.

Suddenly there is a gentle rustling in the bushes. Gill starts and listens. A jackal barks. He whistles low three times. Then the figure of a young girl, clothed in a long cloak, rises near the bushes to the right, and advances towards him.

He has thrown his rifle to the ground, and steps out with a half-suppressed cry of joy.

"Louise!"

The girl is clasped in his arms. Then he hears these words hissed into his ear.

"Dost remember Matteo Leubo, whom thou most foully slew? I am not Louise, but Marina, his sister."

From beneath the folds of her cloak flashes the bright blade of a stiletto. Deep it sinks into the breast of her victim. With scarce a groan he falls dead.

The bugle sounded in the Confederate camp, and the daughter of Corsica disappeared into the darkness.

The victory of the Federals in the battle which took place the next day was chiefly due to their possession of the information which Freemore had obtained from Jackson.

LE VIER.

READ! MARK!! LEARN!!!

We are going to publish a Magazine.
It will be called

Pearson's Magazine.

It will be beautifully Illustrated. It will be Published Monthly. It will cost Sixpence. The first number will appear on

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12th.

These facts are tersely put. They are to be remembered.

We owe no apology for invading a field apparently, perhaps, adequately occupied. We can truthfully say that **Pearson's Magazine** will resemble no other. Holding an opinion, whether rightly or wrongly, that the whole conception and conduct of the British Magazine as it exists to-day is far behind what it should be, we are endeavouring to issue an ideal one. The whole thing will be so original, will embody so many new ideas, and will give so much for so little, that we confidently expect to see **Pearson's Magazine** take the first rank in popularity and prestige from the very commencement. It will be the finest magazine the world has ever seen at the price. In its artistic and literary merits it will stand alone.

That we are prepared to back this sanguine view is shown by the fact that the First Edition of Number One will consist of **200,000 copies**, while the cost of producing it will exceed **Four Thousand Pounds.**

It has become largely the habit of magazine editors to publish the work of the best writers simply because their names are appended to it. We are not going on this system. Nothing will be printed in **Pearson's Magazine** simply because it is written by an author with a great name. At the same time, every man and woman whose writings have gained great repute will be invited to contribute. We want the best work of the best authors and the best artists, and we shall pay the best prices for it.

Every line of **Pearson's Magazine** will be readable, and everybody may read it. It will be clean without being twaddly.

THE

Xmas No. of Pearson's Weekly

Will be ready Wednesday, Nov. 13th.

JUST LOOK AT THE ATTRACTIONS IT WILL CONTAIN.

Three Magnificent Coloured Plates, each of which is, to use an Irishism, better than the other.

Splendid and seasonable stories by the following well-known authors: F. Frankfort-Moore, George Griffith, W. L. Alden, Allen Upward, G. B. Burgin, William Le Queux, and others.

The number will be profusely illustrated throughout by some of the best artists of the day. Among them we may mention Harold Piffard, A. Kemp Tebby, Miss Ethel Porter, Raymond Potter, E. F. Sherie, and E. S. Hope.

THIS IS NOT ALL.

Every purchaser will have a chance of gaining **£50.** For particulars of how to acquire this comfortable little sum we must ask you to look in the Xmas No. itself.

And yet our Xmas No. can be bought on November 13th for Sixpence.

Diamond ✥ Cut ✥ Diamond.

WE were housebreakers, Bill and me, and one night he came into my lodgings, and said: "Look here, Jack, I've just come across the primest job I've seen or heard of for years. It's a semi-detached house in Thatcham; only occupants an old gent with the gout, a footman or butler, and two women servants; but as to the swag, it's enough to make your mouth water! To be sure," he added thoughtfully, "there's a couple of uncommon wicious-looking mastiffs in the back garden, and the mounted cops pass by pretty frequent. But there! it's worth double the risk."

Now, anyone with half an eye to business would have seen that the affair was too risky, but Bill had been drinking hard, and, although I tried to persuade him to leave the job alone, he kept as obstinate as a mule. To tell the plain truth, I had set my mind on a much easier thing at Barnsbury, where, if the swag was not quite so tempting, the risk was nothing like as great.

At last Bill began to get a bit excited; and presently he bursts out: "Risk, indeed! Well, it comes to this, if you're afraid to join me, you can't expect to go shares in the swag, and what's more, you shan't either. You didn't used to be so chicken-hearted, and we'd better separate. I shall go on with my job at Thatcham; and if you want to go to Barnsbury you can go by yourself."

So the end of it was that we broke up the partnership and separated, and I could see that Bill still meant to go to Thatcham, while on my side I was equally determined to carry out my job at Barnsbury.

Now, although, as I said before, Bill and me didn't actually quarrel, yet it riled me to think that if, after all, he did pull off his affair, he would not only have the laugh at me, but would probably have two or three hundred pounds worth of swag all to himself into the bargain; and it was partly the thought of that and partly because I had a kind of wish to get the better of Bill if I could, that after thinking it well over, I took a piece of paper from a cupboard, and after much trouble, for at that time I was not as good a hand at writing or spelling as I am now, managed to turn out a letter something like this:

> To Mister Manning, Oak House, near Thatcham, Kent. Sir,—I feels it to be my duity to inform you that it have come to my knowledge that an attempt is goin' to be made to brake into your house either to-morow night or the next night.—Yours truly, A FRIEND.

When I had sealed and directed this note, I went out and dropped it into a pillar-box; and I don't know how it was, but I felt as if a sort of load was taken off my mind. Then I began to get my tools ready for the job I had on hand, and about half-past eight o'clock I took a train to Highbury.

It was still rather early when I reached the Square, and the lights in the houses had not been put out yet; so after looking up and down to see if all was quiet, I passed my bag through the railings of the Square and hid it carefully among the bushes. Then I walked off to spend an hour or so in a cosy little public-house I had seen on my way from the railway station.

When at last it was late enough to begin work, I came back to the Square and took a look round first to see that all was quiet. Not a soul was about, and the whole Square was in darkness by this time, as there were no street lamps anywhere near.

In another minute I struck a match, and, after lighting my bull's-eye, took the bag from the Square.

The painters had been at work on the house that I was going to break into, and it was that fact that led me to choose that night in particular, for, as I had expected, they had left one of their ladders against the front of the house. They had tied a piece of board up the front of the ladder to prevent anyone climbing up; but such a simple matter never yet stopped a professional burglar, and before you could wink I had climbed up the back of the ladder until I came to the end of the board, when, of course, I got round to the front.

Resting the lantern on the drawing-room window-sill, I was just about to get the window open somehow, when I distinctly heard a creaking noise like an iron gate being opened, and almost before I could look down a great flash of light burst from below as a gruff voice cried sharply: "Now then, the game's up!"

I looked below, and almost dropped off the ladder with fright, for there stood a couple of cops as cool as cucumbers. But I wasn't going to give up if I could help it, and quick as thought I began to climb towards the roof. Before I had gone a dozen steps up the ladder, the second floor window, which I had imagined belonged to the nursery, was dashed up, and another policeman put out his head.

"Now, come," he exclaimed, with a grin, "the game's up, so you'd better come quietly!"

This time I was obliged to confess that it was all up, and in another quarter of an hour I was safe in the nearest police-station, wondering how on earth I had managed the affair so clumsily as to be caught napping in this fashion. The only way to account for it that I could guess was that someone must have seen me hide my tools in the Square.

I was not left long in the dark, however, as to the real reason, for presently a sergeant came in with a slip of paper in his hand.

"Do you know this writing?" he said, with a broad grin on his face; "a lad brought it here about two hours ago."

I took the paper, and I must say that after I had spelt the words over, I was never struck so much of a heap in my life before. This is what was written on the paper as well as I can recollect:

> To the inspector pollis, hibary pollis statan, hibary. This is to gev you notis that number 21 albert square, barnesbery, is going to be broke open tonite.

There was no name at the end of the letter, but I knew who had sent it. The policemen were all grinning away as pleased as you like; and although I felt almost mad, yet I couldn't help thinking what a blessed idiot I had been to carry out the job after falling out with my mate Bill Flowers. Fancy me writing a letter to Thatcham so as to stop his game, and him writing to the police station at Highbury and getting me nabbed! It was the cleanest bowl out I ever heard of—a regular case of "diamond cut diamond."

Well, I went for my trial, and got five years; but now comes the primest part of my story, for the first person I set eyes on when I got into the prison yard was Bill Flowers. He had been caught at Thatcham two nights after me, and had only been brought in the van that very morning.

JEROME PARKER.

Man's Forgiveness.

CHAPTER I.

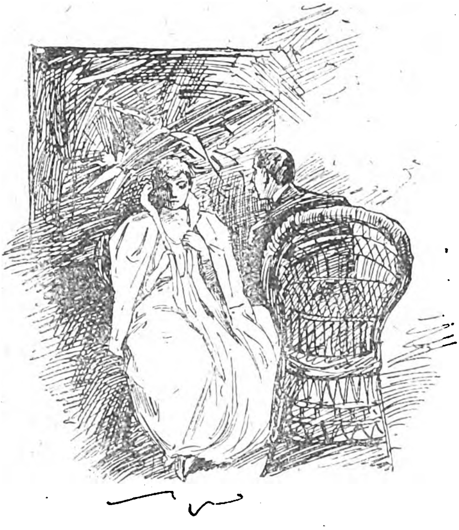
COLONEL AUSTELL'S daughter was the belle of the season, and reported to have had more offers to marriage than Miss Sallie Barnes from Boston, the latest millionairess.

The match-making mothers heaved a sigh of relief when her engagement to Lord Wregis appeared in the *Morning Post*.

"Of course she is making a good match; we always knew she would," said Mrs. Cheveley, meeting a friend at the corner of Victoria Street. "But it really is quite comforting to feel the matter is settled definitely. She was getting too dangerous since she changed her maid and her style of hair-dressing. Anyhow, she will have enough letters of congratulation to answer now to keep her out of mischief for a long time. Are you going to the Stores, too? Good; we can walk together."

So the ladies passed on up the street, still discussing Blanche Austell.

The season was drawing to a close, and all fashionable London had made up Goodwood parties and lists of guests for country houses.



Served as an excuse to pair off after dinner.

Lord Wregis could hardly realise his good fortune when Blanche accepted him—not that he need have wondered, since he was a man any woman might love. Fair and pleasant to look upon, with widely opened blue eyes, and an eminently clean, well groomed appearance. The Austells were his guests at Goodwood, and after that he returned with them to their country seat at Wilton.

They were planning amateur theatricals, and a vast difference of opinion reigned in the house. Miss Barnes, from Boston, considered that she should have first say in the matter, and clamoured for *Pygmalion and Galatea*, or *The Palace of Truth*. "I guess those Grecian robes would suit me down to the ground," she declared, regarding her elegant figure in a long mirror.

"But, my dear Miss Barnes," said Blanche deprecatingly, "they are so hackneyed and *so* ambitious. I would sooner not act at all than drone out 'I love you, Philamir,' till the audience grow sick of the oft-repeated sentiment. We had contemplated the *Pantomime Rehearsal*, but that is really as well-known.

"I pine for a light society drama, with costumes by Worth, and a staircase in the middle of the stage to show off our trains. I simply won't act unless there is a staircase."

"I have set my heart on a moonlight scene," said Sallie Barnes.

"I know a fellow," said Johnnie Saunders, "who goes in for that sort of thing professionally, don't you know. He is quite a gentleman, and most entertaining in society. I have heard people declare that half our amateurs get up their shows as an excuse to flirt with Frank Roy. Of course, it's beastly vulgar of them to say such things, when it is all done for charity."

"How could we get hold of this charming acquisition to manage, coach, and take all the responsibility off our shoulders?" asked Mrs. Austell, relieved beyond measure at young Saunders' suggestion.

"Oh! I will wire to him, if you like, to know if he is disengaged. He could help us then to a piece, and order the scenery from town. It will save us no end of grey hairs and sleepless nights."

"What do you think of the idea, Rex?" said Mrs. Austell, addressing her future son-in-law.

"A capital one," answered Lord Wregis cheerfully.

"I think theatricals are a great bother," sighed Mrs. Austell, "but dear Blanche is so mad about acting, and never really happy unless she is studying a part."

"And a very quick study she is, too," said Lord Wregis, with an admiring glance at his beautiful young *fiancée*. "She makes me hear her parts. Blanche's histrionic genius is a marvel."

The house party had all since their arrival learned and rehearsed at least three different parts a piece, which ended in smoke. They served as an excuse to pair off after dinner, sitting or strolling up and down.

"I hope we shall get Roy," Mr. Saunders remarked. "But he is so often engaged with amateur clubs, and sometimes manages travelling companies. I know he was in the provinces last summer."

Johnnie, however, sent his wire to the "Actor's club," and received a satisfactory reply.

Colonel Austell then communicated with him by letter, and a day was arranged for his arrival. As Blanche was coming up the avenue, she met the phæton and pair going to meet Mr. Roy.

She was alone, and stopping the carriage, sprang into the driver's seat.

"It would be amusing to go to the station," she thought, "and meet the hired stranger."

Blanche was a good whip, and managed the spirited bays to perfection.

She felt a wave of shyness creep over her as she waited for the train to steam up to the platform. It was quite a new experience for her, to feel a qualm of trepidation.

A dark, almost Spanish-looking man came towards the carriage, with clean cut features and magnetic eyes.

Blanche bent forward and introduced herself.

A moment later he was beside her in the phæton, and they drove back through the country lanes.

There was no lack of conversation, for Mr. Roy brimmed over with pleasant anecdotes and mild sarcasms about his career Blanche found herself confiding to him her wild passion for the stage, the ecstasy she experienced when indulging her talent, and asking his advice on the best studies.

In fact, she had so much to say, that she felt quite sorry when they passed through the gates of Salisbury Hall.

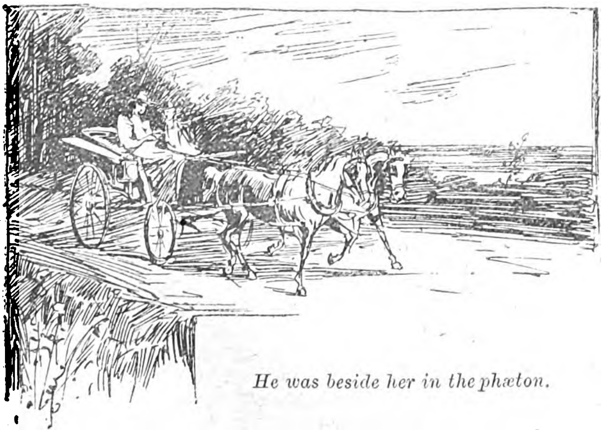
Lord Wregis and Johnnie Saunders were smoking in the verandah as the carriage drove up to the door.

Blanche's smiling eyes detected a look of annoyance on her *fiancé's* face as she stepped lightly to the ground.

"Have *you* been to the station?" he asked.

"Well, it looks like it," she replied laughing.

Then she introduced Frank Roy, and they went into the conservatory for tea. All the doors were flung open—one leading to a drawing-room, and the others to the garden. A host of low inviting chairs were placed near the wicker tea-table, standing by a bank of maidenhair fern.



He was beside her in the phæton.

A fountain played at the far end, in which Blanche would feed her gold fish with crumbs from her cake.

Again the topic of conversation turned to the subject of a play. Finally *The Ladies' Battle* was decided upon.

"It is rather an appropriate name," lisped Captain Raleigh, an admirer of Sallie Barnes, who wanted to replenish his attenuated coffers.

"Yes," cried the sprightly Sallie, flashing her diamond rings. "We have all quarrelled dreadfully since theatricals were on the *tapis*."

"Mr. Roy, of course, will be Henri," said Blanche. "I shall be the countess, and Sallie will be Léonie. I know it is rather a small part for you, dear," turning to her friend. "But Mr. Roy arranged it all coming from the station."

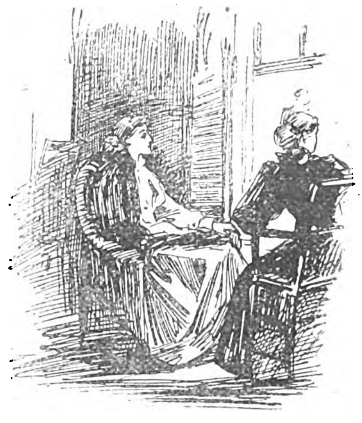
Sallie's face fell. She yearned to be a countess, if only in masquerade.

CHAPTER II.

BLANCHE was sitting in the library window discussing Frank Roy with Miss Barnes.

"Is he not coaching us splendidly?" she said.

"Yes," replied Sallie somewhat sharply, "and especially his love scenes with you. I notice he always takes them twice over. If I were Lord Wregis I should be quite uneasy."



Sitting in the library window.

"Nonsense, my dear girl, it is his love of art, not the common craving for flirtation, which lights the fire in 'Henri's' eyes, and strips his soul bare to the audience when he cries: 'What a face, what intellect, what soul!'"

"That is because he sees *you* in the wings waiting for your cue, Blanche. I should certainly advise you to be careful. That sort of people sometimes go too far. I had some experience once of an operatic singer in a New York Hotel. He was impertinent enough to ask me to marry him."

"Yes, but that was very different; you were not engaged."

"Oh! yes I was. But it came to an end when I crossed the Atlantic. I had so many admirers on board; it seemed quite a pity to be tied up. England is the place to marry well in."

"Rex is far too generous—too good and manly to be jealous," protested Blanche, her mind still fixed on the subject of Frank Roy. "Rex believes in me so thoroughly, he would never for a moment doubt my constancy. If he did I should not love him."

"*Do* you love him?" asked Sallie, opening her eyes very wide.

Blanche flushed rosy red.

The question startled her.

"What an odd thing to say, Sallie! Why, of course. I am engaged to him."

"Yes, but that doesn't always count. We sometimes love just the people we are *not* engaged to—and never can be. The impossibles, you know. It is tremendously fascinating to imagine yourself madly attached to some one who is utterly out of your reach—married—or penniless—or——"

"Don't!" cried Blanche, with a little cry, putting her hands to her ears; "you frighten me, Sallie, when you talk so."

She was white to the lips now, and her friend saw it.

"There is a certain sorcery about love, Blanche; it is an overpowering passion that sometimes leads you astray, before you know you are in its clutches—a witchcraft—a——"

"Really," broke in Miss Austell, with a nervous laugh, "one would think you were in love, Sallie."

"Perhaps I am," she replied, "with Mr. Roy! He is a most fascinating man, and as handsome as an Englishman."

"He *is* an Englishman."

"There is foreign blood in those dark eyes, mark my words; and the tone of his skin is decidedly that of the south."

"Hush!" as a step was heard on the verandah.

"Why, it is Mr. Roy," whispered Sallie, "and in dress clothes, too. We shall be horribly late for dinner. It is past seven."

"I dare say he heard you talking, and has been just outside all the time," said Blanche, her heart sinking.

"I *should smile!*" declared Sallie, sauntering out of the room.

Blanche paused a moment by the window, gazingly dreamily at the red sky.

Frank Roy saw her, and as their eyes met, the girl's cheeks seemed suddenly suffused by the after-glow from the setting sun.

"I must go and dress," she said; "but I want that yellow rose, and it is just out of my reach"—pointing to the wall of the house—"will you pick it for me, Henri?"

He reached up and plucked the flower eagerly.

"How good you are to me!" he murmured, holding out the rose.

"Good! Why?"

"To let me serve you, and gather the blossom you will wear to-night on your heart."

A light little laugh broke from Blanche, but there was a ring of tragedy in it.

She was thinking of the good, loving, trusting man to whom she had promised her hand.

"Must you go yet, can you not stay one moment longer?" whispered Frank Roy.

A strange thrill of terror ran like a knife through Blanche.

Why did her heart beat faster with joy when this dark man laid his hand on her arm and spoke in lowered tones? Why did Rex's open smile and honest eyes fade from her vision?

Was it the sorcery, the witchcraft, of which Sallie Barnes had spoken?

She tried to remember her lover's unselfish devotion, his nobility of character, and place it before the alluring accents of another's whispered adoration. But the fascination of Frank Roy was falling round her like a cloud, a heavy smothering vapour, soothing her harassed mind with deadly perfumes.

"Please do not detain me," she said faintly, grasping the yellow rose.

As she took it from him he slipped a sheet of paper into her palm.

Then Blanche fled from the rooms, for the walls had a thousand eyes, and the doors were full of ears. Even the pictures on the staircase scowled and frowned, while the mirrors reflected her guilty conscience.

She met Lord Wregis on the landing.

"Dearest," he said, "you are very late."

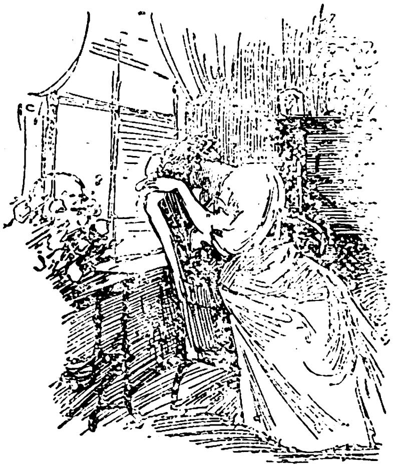
"I know."

He took the rose from her, though she retained the hidden writing.

"What do you want with it, Rex?"

"I am going to wear it to-night, Blanche, because you picked it, because it is yours."

"But yellow is a jealous colour, and the rose is too large for a button-hole."



And cried—for a yellow rose!

"Not so large as my heart, darling, or the love that fills it. No, Blanche," as she held out both hands intreatingly for the blossom. "I will go and gather you a hundred more—leave me this one."

Something very like a tear glistened in the girl's blue eyes as she reached her room. They both had blue eyes—Rex and Blanche.

She read the crumpled sheet of writing, verses in Frank Roy's peculiarly artistic hand, raving sentimentally over Miss Austell's delicate finger tips.

"I never thought there was so much poetry in nails. If father or mother knew—if Rex knew!"

Her head drooped, her breast heaved. She pressed the doggerel passionately to her lips, and cried—for a yellow rose!

"You are not doing your part a bit well to-night, Countess," cried Blanche in her shrillest treble. "You seem as limp as a muffin. Are you beginning stage fright, for the all-eventful evening is drawing horribly near, and the seats are selling like wildfire? I believe you will be able to build an entirely new ward for your pet hospital."

"Better still, she might have erected a new building altogether if she had no theatricals at all," said Johnnie cynically.

"How, Mr. Saunders?"

"By giving the money that is being spent on scenery and frocks, music and printing, to be sure! Think what a lot of trouble it would have saved us, too."

"But we should not have had any fun then," declared Sallie. "Besides," lowering her voice, "that remark of yours was hardly polite to Mr. Roy. I thought you were going to run him in with the 'properties.' I did not think you were so *gauche!*"

"He will forgive me, and was far too busy rehearsing Miss Austell in her fit of mock laughter, to listen to anyone else. Did you hear those stingy old Brownings shied at the seven-shilling seats, and are going in half-crown unreserveds?"

"How mean of them; some people have no scruples. But they are ten in family, and all at home."

"Blanche is feeling rather faint—we are not going to finish the rehearsal," said Mrs. Austell, who acted as prompter.

"Shall we go into the ballroom and have a hop?" suggested Johnnie.

The idea was immediately taken up.

"Yes, if Lord Wregis will play." Rex, who was the best natured fellow living, readily agreed.

"Don't you bother your head about these people, darling," he whispered to Blanche. "I will look after them, and see they are amused. Just you sit quiet till you feel better; shall I make you comfortable on the lounge in the blue-room?"

"Thank you so much," she replied, with a wan smile.

He piled the cushions behind her head, and brought her a bottle of lavender salts.

"Would you like a book, dearest?"

"No. I will rest and think."

"Let some of the thoughts be for me," he said tenderly.

"Are you coming to dance, Mr. Roy?" asked Sallie, as they left the stage.

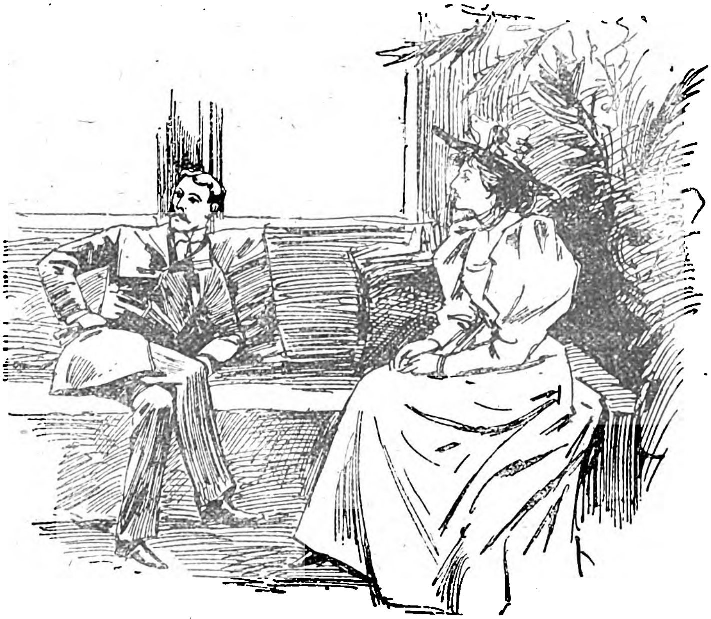
"No. I want to run over my part alone. I have had no time to consider it, and I am a very indifferent dancer."

He had been close to Lord Wregis when he spoke to Blanche.

Frank had heard some mention of the blue-room. Stealthily his steps stole in that direction. He pushed back the door and walked in boldly, then started at the sight of Miss Austell, and apologised profusely.

"A thousand pardons—I had no intention of disturbing you."

"Oh! I am glad you came," said Blanche, rising. "I am better now, but my head aches a little. This room is too hot. I shall go out on the verandah and stroll up and down."



"*Who would have thought it?" said Sallie Barnes.*

"May *I* come?"

"Of course, if you like."

They passed out together into the cool air, which played on Blanche's heated forehead.

"Only a few more nights," whispered the man, "and we shall never meet again. Our paths are very different—we shall go our separate ways—apart."

A deep sigh escaped Blanche.

"How I envy you in your career," she said; "you are going to travel with your own company—to act my favourite plays. Some day I may chance on a theatre and see your name. I may watch you across the glare of the footlights, and applaud——"

"Do not kill me with your light talk," he muttered passionately. "Is it nothing to you that I go with a broken heart, that my life's love is but a plaything in the hands of one so far above me? Oh! to adore a star beyond your reach—to worship at a shrine of stone and ice—*that* is true torture—*real* pain! Blanche! Blanche! won't you say one kind word to your Henri before he goes?"

"*Certainly not," said the indignant mother.*

"Don't ask me," she replied, battling with a fierce temptation. "I am only human! Go away!"

She knew she was ready to give her soul into his keeping, to sacrifice everything for the sake of this love that deadened every other thought.

Her peace of mind had been destroyed, a burning fire raged within.

"Be mine," he whispered, drawing her to him, and seeing her weakness. "Be my wife, Blanche—beloved! You shall satisfy your glorious talent—and rise to fame—you will have all London at your feet in time! I adore—worship you—you shall never regret the step."

Voices were calling her; she had been missed.

His lips pressed her cheeks. For the moment she feared her senses were deserting her.

Then, turning to him in a fit of blind rapture, she looked straight into his eyes.

"Yes, yes, Frank!"

CHAPTER III.

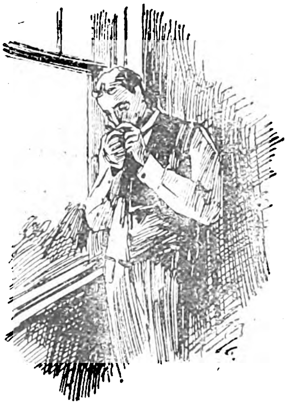
"Who would have thought it?" said Sallie Barnes. "Dear Blanche was such a sweet girl, brought up in the lap of luxury. In fact, the very last person in the world of whom one would have expected such a thing. I used to chaff her a bit about him, you know, Mr. Saunders, when we were both staying at Salisbury Hall. I wish she had never got up those miserable theatricals that led to her doom. It was all your fault, too, for you introduced Frank Roy; but I suppose you have heard all the scandal?"

"No, I have not. Raleigh told me Miss Austell had chucked poor Wregis, and made a shocking *mésalliance*."

"Why, she is acting in a travelling company in the provinces, under the personal direction of her husband.

Naturally she has quite cut herself adrift from home and friends. Lord Wregis is perfectly broken-hearted! I hear her parents have vowed to cast her out of their world, never to look on her face again."

All the light had indeed gone out of Lord Wregis's life when Blanche fell from the lofty pedestal on which he had placed and loved her; yet he did not wrap himself up in the stony anger with which Colonel and Mrs. Austell tried to bury their sorrow.



In the solitude of his room.

He came himself to Blanche's mother, imploring her to forgive her daughter's caprice.

"I find Blanche is to be at the Comedy Theatre, Manchester, this week," he said. "I intend seeking her out. If I can persuade her to leave the stage, will you receive her?"

"Certainly not," said the indignant mother. "I have done with her for ever."

So Lord Wregis returned disheartened, to gaze for hours, in the solitude of his room, at the beautiful face of his lost love, in the gold locket she had given him.

Already Blanche Roy had awoke from the fool's paradise to which she had flown. Her health and spirits drooped, while her thoughts would wander back regretfully to her home, the good man whose love she had discarded—a blinded victim no longer.

If only the past could be recalled! Her stage life was one of toil and bondage; her husband an exacting master, the worst side of whose nature she soon discovered.

Lord Wregis went to Manchester, and with a fast-beating heart and careworn mien sought the theatre. He met a friend at the entrance who had known Blanche in past days. The man spoke to him casually, yet the few words of conversation galled him.

He sent a note to the stage-door, asking if he might see her.

The answer came in a few hurriedly-written lines:

"Not to-night; I cannot bear it. Come to the above address to-morrow morning. I am in great trouble."

The following day he drove to her lodgings, inquiring anxiously for Mrs. Roy.

Blanche appeared pale and trembling.

"Oh! Rex," she cried, "I am so glad you are here. Frank is dreadfully ill. I am frightened out of my life!"

She looked so child-like and helpless in her distress that he involuntarily drew her to him, as in the old days.

"Oh! don't, don't," she sobbed. "It seems so wicked to think how I loved him once, and now he is dying, and I cannot even pray for him to live. I feel so sinful, Rex. I loathe and hate myself!"

She led the way to a darkened room, and side by side they stood over the unconscious man, watching the grey shadow of death creep across his features.

The slumbering form struggled for a moment with some mighty foe, then sank back into a last still sleep.

"You may leave him," whispered the doctor to Lord Wregis, "and take that poor woman away. Her husband is dead."

As Rex led her from the room, she knew the truth, and her eyes were ablaze with passionate emotion. She clung to him in mortal terror, sobbing helplessly in his arms.

As Rex clasped the trembling form, the intoxication of his old love rose up to thrill him, as in the bygone days.

A complete and perfect sympathy reigned between them—a magnetism of soul.

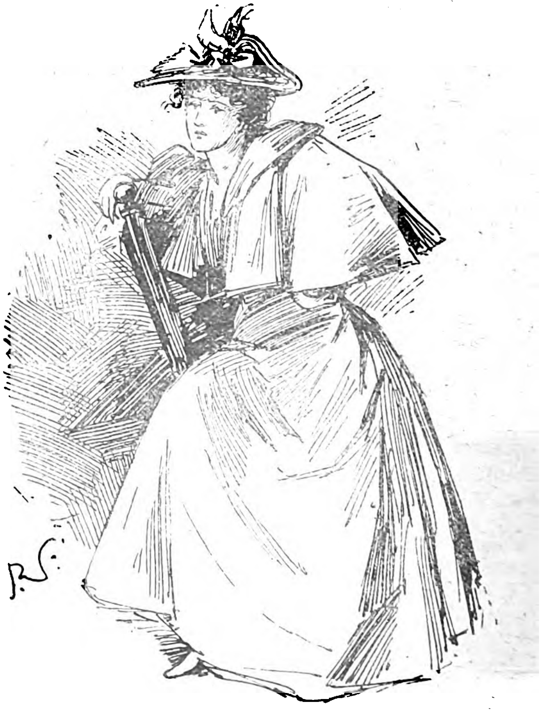
* * * * *

Mrs. Roy was taken back into favour when she became Lady Wregis, though she had mourned her departed husband through long months, gowned in deepest black.

"It really is most romantic," said Sallie, when the dismal weeds were flung aside, and another band of gold encircled Blanche's finger. "It was simply lovely of that dear fellow to marry her after all, when she treated him so shamefully. Don't you think so, Mr. Saunders?"

"I would have done the same for you," he replied adoringly.

"Nonsense, Johnnie. Now you are *not* to propose again, because I am contemplating accepting Captain Raleigh. Blanche's wedding caused quite a sensation, didn't it? A girl with a history is always interesting, and everyone was bound to admire Lord Wregis' loyalty and devotion."



A blinded victim no longer.

"I want to talk about ourselves," persists Johnnie Saunders.

"You make me tired," drawled Sallie Barnes.

Winifred Graham.

THE MAGICAL CARDS.

(This tale is very popular in the kingdom of Naples, and, like many other legends owing their origin to that country, is remarkable for a curious mixture of Greek mythology and the beliefs of Christianity.)

ONCE upon a time there lived a young nobleman named Federigo, a handsome, well-built fellow of courteous manners and pleasing address, but, alas! of dissolute habits. He was excessively fond of wine and play, especially the latter. He never went to confession, and only haunted churches in quest of fresh opportunities for sin. Thus it happened that Federigo, after having ruined at play twelve young men of good family, who, in their desperation, became bandits, and perished unshriven in a desperate conflict with the king's soldiers, experienced himself a turn of luck, and in a short time, lost, not only all that he had won, but, in addition thereto, all of his inheritance, except a small estate in the country, where he retired to conceal his poverty and shame.

Three years he spent in retirement, hunting by day, and gambling for small stakes with his steward at night.

One day, just after returning from the most successful day's hunt he had ever had, a party of strangers, thirteen in number, came to his door and claimed his hospitality. Federigo, who was blessed with a generous soul, was rejoiced at the opportune arrival of guests on a day when he had ample provision for their entertainment. He accordingly bade them enter, made them welcome with the best grace in the world, and begged their indulgence if he did not entertain them suitably, as their visit had taken him completely by surprise.

"We will content ourselves with what you have," said the leader of the party, "but have supper ready as quickly as possible, as it is late, and my friend here," pointing to the most aged of his companions, "is very hungry."

Federigo did not wait to be told twice, but began preparations, and being desirous of treating his visitors to something better than the fruits of his hunt, ordered his steward to slay the last remaining kid. No sooner said than done, and the kid lay broiling on the spit.

When the supper was ready, Federigo expressed his regret to the chief of his guests that his wine was not of better quality.

Whereupon the stranger, having tasted the wine, replied:

"What do you complain of? You wine is perfect. I leave it to my friend here," pointing to the old man previously referred to.

The latter having sipped it, pronounced it excellent, and begged his host to drink with him. Federigo, who attributed all these compliments to the good breeding of his guests, filled his glass. What was his surprise to discover that the wine was more delicious than any he had ever tasted in his most prosperous days?

Divining from this miracle the presence of supernatural visitors, he immediately rose from the table, feeling himself unworthy to eat in such holy company, but the stranger commanded him to resume his seat, which he did.

After supper the visitors retired to the apartment that had been prepared for them, and Federigo, left alone with his steward, sat down to his customary game of cards, and drank up what was left of the magical wine.

The next day the visitors, being about to depart, their leader said to Federigo:

"We are well pleased with your treatment of us, and desire to reward you. Make three requests and they shall be granted, for we are all-powerful in Heaven, on Earth, and in the Infernal Regions."

Federigo drew from his pocket the pack of cards which never left him, and said:

"Master, let me win every game I play with these cards."

"So be it," was the reply.

The old man of the party, who stood close to Federigo (and who was no other than Saint Peter), said to him in a low voice:

"What can you be thinking of, miserable sinner? Why don't you ask for the salvation of your soul?"

"I'm not worried about my soul," replied Federigo.

"You have still two wishes," resumed the Master.

"Since you are so good to me, Master," said Federigo, "let it come to pass that whoever shall climb into the orange tree that shades my door shall be unable to come down without my permission."

"So be it."

At these words the good Saint Peter exclaimed:

"Miserable sinner, do you not fear the Inferno that awaits you? Ask the Master for a place in Paradise. You still have time."

"Oh, there is no hurry," replied Federigo, edging away from the keeper of the heavenly keys.

Being asked to name the third request, he said:

"I wish that whoever shall seat himself on that stool at my fireside shall be unable to rise without my consent."

This request was also granted, and the visitors departed on their journey.

They were not out of sight before Federigo, in his haste to test the powers of his precious pack of cards, hastily summoned his steward and engaged him in a game. Federigo played carelessly, scarcely looking at his hand. He won the first game without effort, then a second, then a third. Convinced that henceforth he could infallibly win, he immediately hastened to the city, alighted at the finest inn, and engaged its best apartments. The news of his arrival soon spread, and his former companions in debauch came in droves to see him.

"We thought we had lost you for ever," said Don Guiseppe. "We heard that you had turned hermit."

"You heard the truth," replied Federigo.

"How ever did you pass the time all these years that we have not seen you?" demanded the others.

"In prayer, my dear brethren," said Federigo, assuming a satisfied air; "and here, my friends," continued he, "is my prayer book," drawing from his pocket the pack of cards that he had guarded with tender care.

This sally elicited general laughter, and every one was convinced that Federigo had retrieved his fortunes in some foreign country at the expense of players less skilful than themselves; they were therefore burning for a chance to clean him out a second time.

Some of them, in their haste, proposed a game without further delay. But Federigo begged of them to postpone play for a while, invited them to an adjoining chamber, where a magnificent repast awaited them.

Before the arrival of his guests, Federigo had provided himself with a pack of cards precisely similar to the old one, with the view of substituting one for the other, as occasion might demand; his intention being to lose one out of every three or four games, in order to divert suspicion. He carried one pack in his right pocket, and the other in his left.

After supper, the company having seated themselves round a green-covered table, Federigo first brought out his profane pack, and fixed the limit of the game at a reasonable sum. Being anxious to enjoy the game and to measure his strength, he brought his utmost strength into play, but lost both the first and second games, not without secret vexation. He then ordered wine to be brought in, and took advantage of the moment when his guests were drinking to their past and future success to introduce his lucky pack. The other was deftly transferred to his pocket.

When the third game was in hand Federigo paid no further attention to the game, but employed himself in watching the others, and caught them cheating.

"Good," said he, "this justifies my taking from them without mercy."

His ruin had been the result of their trickery, not of their superior play or better luck. This theory gave him much comfort. It enabled him to entertain a higher opinion of his own relative skill, an opinion based on previous successes.

The third game was followed by many others, of which Federigo contrived to win the greatest number, so that he gathered in enough on the first night's play to pay for the supper and a month's rent. This was glory enough for one day. His disappointed companions promised on taking their leave to return the next evening.

The next day, and every day following, Federigo lost and won so judiciously, that in a short time he had accumulated quite a fortune, without awakening any suspicion as to the source of his good luck.

In due course of time he moved from his inn to a grand palace, where, from time to time, he gave magnificent entertainments, and the palace of Federigo became famous as the centre of pleasure.

At the end of a year of discreet play, he determined to put the crowning touch to his vengeance by impoverishing the leading nobles of the country. To this end, having converted into precious stones the bulk of his wealth, he invited these noblemen eight days in advance to a feast of extraordinary magnificence, for which he placed in requisition the best musicians and ballet-dancers in the country. It was announced that the festivities would wind up in a game without limit to the betting.

Everybody was anxious to go. Those who had no money squeezed it out of the Jews. The others brought their all. Federigo made a clean sweep of it, and departed the same night with his gold and precious stones. From that time on he adopted a rule not to use his lucky cards except against players whom he suspected of cheating. In a fair game he felt himself a master of all comers. In this manner he travelled all over the world, winning always, and living everywhere on the fat of the land.

In spite of all this, the memory of the twelve victims would thrust itself upon his conscience and embitter all his joys. At last he resolved one day to deliver them or share their fate.

Having taken this resolution, he started for the lower regions with a stick in his hand and a sack on his back, and without other escorts than his famous greyhound, which was called Marchesella. Arrived in Sicily, he scaled Mount Gibel, and plunged into the mouth of a volcano.

When he arrived at the bottom he was still separated from the entrance to Pluto's dominions by a courtyard, in which Cerberus stood guard. Federigo, taking advantage of a moment when Cerberus was busily occupied in making the acquaintance of Marchesella, ran rapidly across the yard, knocked at the door, and was forthwith conducted into Pluto's presence.

"Who art thou?" demanded the King of the Lower Regions.

"I am the gambler Federigo."

"What do you want here?"

"Pluto, if you think that the most expert gambler in the world is fit company for you to play with, here is what I propose. If I lose a single game you may have my soul to enrich your collection; but, if I win, it shall be my privilege to select one of your subjects for every game I win, and carry him away with me."

"Agreed," said Pluto, and called for a pack of cards.

"I have the cards," immediately said Federigo, and drew from his pocket the magical pack, and then began to play.

Federigo won the first game, and demanded the soul of Stefano Pagani, one of the twelve that he had come to save. It was immediately delivered, and Federigo placed it in his sack.

In the same way he won the second game, and the third, and so on up to twelve, and every time he won a game he called for one of the souls in which he was interested, and placed it in his sack. When he had completed the dozen he offered to keep on playing.

"Willingly," said Pluto (who was becoming wearied with losing), "but let us go out for an instant, it's getting uncomfortably hot here."

The truth was, he only sought a pretext to get rid of Federigo; for no sooner was he outside with his twelve souls than Pluto shouted at the top of his lungs: "Let the door be shut upon him."

The interview in the front yard between Cerberus and Federigo's greyhound was still going on, enabling Federigo to recross the yard without attracting the attention of that redoubtable watch dog. He then called Marchesella, who lost no time in rejoining his master, and with difficulty ascended to the mouth of the volcano on the summit of Mount Gibel. After emerging from the crater, he descended in the direction of Messina, more rejoiced at his spiritual victory than he had ever been over any earthly success. Arrived at Messina, he embarked for his native land, to end his days on his ancient manor.

At the end of thirty years (Federigo was then seventy) Death came to him and warned him to put his conscience in order, as his hour had come.

"I'm ready," said the dying man; "but before you carry me off give me some of the fruit of that tree that shades my door, and I will die happy."

"If that is all you want," said Death, "I am willing to gratify you."

He got up into the tree to gather an orange; but when he started to come down, he found it impossible to move.

"Ah, Federigo," cried he, "you have fooled me. I am in your power. Let me down and I will give you ten years of life."

"Ten years! I want more time than that," said Federigo. "If you wish to come down, old man, you'll have to give me more."

"I'll give you twenty."

"Your offer is but moderate."

"I'll give you thirty."

"You must yet go higher."

"Is it possible that you wish to live a century?"

"I do."

"But, Federigo, you are unreasonable."

"That I cannot help. I love life, and must have one hundred years. I need them in my business."

"Agreed, a hundred years it shall be," said Death.

No sooner said than he was able to get down.

As soon as he was gone, Federigo rose from his bed in a condition of perfect health, and began life anew with the vigour of youth and the experience of age.

The hundred years rolled on, and Death again knocked at his door, and found him in bed.

"Are you ready?" said Death.

"I have sent for my confessor," replied Federigo; "take a seat near the fire till he comes. I only await absolution before plunging into eternity with you."

Death, who was a good fellow, sat himself down on the stool, and waited an entire hour for the priest to arrive.

Beginning at last to get bored, he said to his host: "Old man, have you not yet had time to put yourself in order during the century which has elapsed since our last meeting?"

"I had many other things to attend to," said the old man, with a mocking smile.

"Very well," replied Death, shocked at his impiety, "you have not another moment to live."

"Bah!" said Federigo, while Death tried in vain to rise. "I know that you will again grant me a few more years of respite."

"More years, wretch!" and he made futile efforts to get away from the chimney.

"Yes, certainly; but this time I'll not be so exacting; and as old age has no longer any charms for me, I'll be satisfied with forty years for my third course."

Death saw that he was fixed to his seat, just as he had before been to the tree, by a supernatural agency, but in his rage he was disinclined to yield.

"I know a way to hasten your decision," said Federigo; and he threw three faggots on the fire. The flames soon flew up and made it so hot for Death that he suffered torture.

"Spare me, spare me," he cried, when he felt his old bones burning; "I'll give you forty years of health."

At these words Federigo dissolved the spell, and Death flew off, half roasted.

At the expiration of the allotted time he came after his man, and found him ready with a sack on his shoulder.

"This time," he said, "I've got you safely; there is no retreat now. What are you going to do with the sack?"

"It contain the souls of twelve gamblers, friends of mine, whom I delivered from the Inferno."

"Let them return there with you, then," said Death. And, seizing Federigo by the hair, he flew into the air, turned towards the south, and plunged into the yawning mouth of Mount Gibel.

Arrived at the doors of the Inferno he knocked three times.

"Who's there?" said Pluto.

"Federigo, the gambler," replied Death.

"Well, he can't come in here," said Pluto, who immediately recalled the twelve games he had lost; "that scamp would depopulate my empire; keep that door closed."

As Pluto was firm in his refusal to open, Death transported his prisoner to the gates of purgatory, but the angel on duty refused him admission, as he found him in a condition of mortal sin.

It therefore became necessary, to the great disgust of Death, who hated Federigo, to steer towards the Celestial Regions.

"Who art thou?" said Saint Peter to Federigo, after Death had dropped him at the gates of Paradise.

"Your former host," replied he.

"Dost thou presume to present thyself here in a condition of sin?" exclaimed Saint Peter.

"Saint Peter," said Federigo, "is this the way I received you when you came, about a hundred and seventy years ago, and asked my hospitality?"

"There's no resisting this man," said the Saint; "let him enter since he is here."

And through the golden gates Federigo passed.

E. GARNET.

THE FATAL DAGH

It was during the last evening of Bertram Chatsworth's and my own stay at Foxon Hall that he and I sat alone in the smoking-room.

He was silent—in fact, he had been silent and moody all day, a circumstance which surprised me, for he was naturally of a gay and lively disposition; he no longer chaffed, but sat back in his chair dreamily watching the faint wreath of blueish smoke that issued from the end of his cigar.

I had cudgelled my brains for quite a long while to know what he was thinking about, and it seemed highly probable that in the end I should have been as wise as when I commenced had not a coal come to my rescue. The fire, which for a long while had been burning hollow, yielding to the coaxing of my toe, suddenly caved in and a cinder fell with clatter on the fender. Bert started, smiled apologetically, and then said: "Excuse me, old fellow; you must think me frightfully boorish. My thoughts were far away in distant Australia, when that coal awoke me from my reverie."

"I myself was miles away in thought," I replied. "Do you know, Bert, that I have half a mind to run over to Australia next year? I have often wished to see Melbourne."

"Do, old fellow!" he replied heartily, taking a cigar from the box that lay on the table, and cutting off the end with a dagger-shaped knife of peculiar workmanship.

"That's a peculiar *pocket-knife*," I said chaffingly; "do you always take it about with you?"

"Yes," he replied gravely; "and I always shall till I return it to the owner—or till I die!"

"Then it isn't yours?" I queried.

"No! You know how my poor father met his death in the bush, stabbed in the back by an assassin's hand?"

"Yes," I replied; "but what has that knife to do with him?"

"My father was killed with it," replied Bert simply, as he replaced it in its sheath in his belt.

"Great Heavens!" I ejaculated, "why not give such a clue to the police? I should dread to carry such a memento about me."

"No, I shall not give any clue to the police," he replied, turning his handsome face to me. "Police? Ha! ha! What good are they? I shall confront the murderer face to face, and tax him with the deed! But—he may be married," continued Bert thoughtfully, "and if he is my vengeance would be foiled."

"And why should he be spared because he is married?" I queried.

"Ah! cannot you understand why?" said Bert gently. "His wife may know nothing of the stain on his soul. Why should I bring sorrow on a peaceful household? No, the children shall not suffer for their father's sin! I will not be the cause of their being scorned and shunned in after years as being the children of a—no! no! I'll tax him with the deed," continued Bert, his voice rising as he spoke, "and bid him come to some country where duelling is winked at. I shall bid him think of his wife and children! If I kill him my father will be avenged, and they will think that he died an honest man. If I die he will have nothing more to fear."

"But, Bert——"

"I should know him in a thousand," said Bert, unheeding my interruption, "and although he escaped my avenging bullet eighteen years ago, I promise you the next time he shall not be so fortunate. But come, old fellow, it is ten o'clock; we had better go to the drawing-room," he exclaimed as he rose from his chair and flung the end of his cigar into the grate. "The ladies and our host must be ready to go to this ball, I should say."

"Are you going to take that knife to the Oulan's dance to-night," I queried laughingly. Bert advanced towards the door, then, turning to me, he said gaily:

"That knife seems to amuse you—yes, I shall take it! Come along."

* * * * *

The ball given in honour of Mr. Oulan's engagement with Miss Villiers had commenced some time when we arrived, and as we made our way through the throng to greet Mr. Oulan and his *fiancée* I saw the former's face grow pale. He answered my salutations absently and bowed stiffly when I introduced Bert to him. "Excuse me, Mr. Herman," he said, following me as I advanced towards the dancers, "but is your friend a Colonial?"

"Slightly," I replied with a laugh; "he has lived in Australia thirty years; he was born there. Why do you ask?"

"Curiosity, mere curiosity," he replied absently; then seeing a young lady sitting with her mother close by, he continued: "allow me to introduce Mr. Herman to you, he is a capital dancer and a good conversationalist. Mr. Herman, Miss Merton; Miss Merton, Mr. Herman;" and, so saying, he disappeared.

The minutes flew swiftly by unheeded in the rhythm of the dance. I had claimed Miss Merton for every dance on her programme up to supper-time, and I was much amused at seeing the look of intense disgust depicted on the various faces when she said she was engaged for the dance solicited.

At last the clock struck twelve, the music ceased, and I took Miss Merton into supper, after having extracted from her the promise of having her as a partner for the next two waltzes.

The conversation at the supper-table was of the ordinary style until a certain Mr. Salter remarked what a peculiarly handsome scimitar hung over the mantelpiece. Nearly all the guests turned to look at the weapon; various comments also were passed on the beautiful tracery of the designs on the blade.

In the pause that momentarily followed these remarks I heard Bert say:

"Yes, it's a fine blade as far as designs goes, but I have a dagh traced even more curiously than that one up there!"

"Have you?" exclaimed Mr. Salter; "I wish I could see it!"

"Nothing easier, my dear sir," replied Bert, taking it from his belt and handing it to him across the table. "There it is, inspect it at your leisure."

"It is a Siamese dagh!" said Mr. Salter, after a brief inspection.

"Your pardon—a Burmese!" corrected Bert. "There is a tragic tale connected with that weapon!"

"Is there?" cried several voices; "do tell us."

"I feel quite certain it is Siamese," exclaimed Mr. Salter. "Here, Oulan, you are a good judge of Burmese work; tell me, is that Burmese?"

The dagh was passed down, each one inspecting it as they handed it along.

"Do tell the tale, please, Mr. Chatworth," exclaimed Miss Villiers. "It will be so nice to put a stop to the gossip that is going on."

"That is Burmese work," said Oulan, as with paling cheek he gazed at the weapon in his hand. "If the tale is ghastly, pray don't tell us about it; remember there are ladies present."

"I will leave it to the vote," replied Bert impassively.

Then, as cries of "Do tell us," resounded from all sides, he smiled sadly at Miss Villiers, and began:

"It is an old tale, and deals with a tragedy which, eighteen years ago, made Australia ring from Torres Straits to Bass Straits with horror. It was about a man who had killed another—his best friend—for the greed of gold." Here the narrator paused, then, after a moment's hesitation, he continued: "About twenty miles from Teetulpa there was a deep ravine; about half way down its rugged side, ran a ledge. Below, above, all around was bush—the great trackless bush!"

"Teetulpa!" said Mr. Salter, "why, that was the centre of the gold mining district in South Australia. Oh, you needn't look at me ladies and gentlemen," he said laughingly. "My superior knowledge came from our mutual friend, Oulan, who has so often told me of his adventures while in that very town!"

"Indeed!" remarked Bert in a surprised tone of voice. "Then doubtless you have seen the very spot to which I allude, Mr. Oulan?"

"Ye—es—I have—seen it!" replied Oulan hesitatingly.

"It was a desolated spot, then," continued Bert, "and one evening in the middle of September three figures might have been seen riding along its little-frequented track. Two of the riders were men, the third was but a lad in years—being only twelve—but a man in courage. He had dropped a long way behind the others, as his horse was tired. His two companions had already rounded the corner which marks the centre of the gulch, when he heard a pistol shot. Setting spurs to his horse he galloped on and saw the two men locked in a deadly embrace; ere he could interfere, one of the combatants had raised that dagh twice, and had twice sheathed it in his adversary's side."

A low murmur of horror broke from all present. Oulan poured himself out a glass of wine with a shivering hand, but he did not drink.

"The man, mortally wounded, fell," continued Bert impassively, "and as the lad dashed on to avenge his death the villain fired, killing the boy's horse, which, in its last agony, leapt into the air and then went crashing into the gulch below, carrying its rider with him; and there, fifty feet below the ledge, the lad watched the miner rob his friend and throw his body into the gulch. With a howl of execration the lad leapt to his feet and fired at the contemptible coward; the next moment a bullet crashed through his arm, smashing the bone in its flight, stretching him senseless and bleeding to the ground. When he recovered consciousness dawn was breaking. He was alone in the bush! He approached the corpse, the dagh (which Mr. Oulan has just placed before him) was still in the wound; he extracted it and kept it. There is the tale, there is nothing more to add, except that the lad swore to avenge the fallen man with it!"

"Are you that lad?" cried Oulan, in a shaky voice, as he arose ashy white, holding the glass of wine in his hand.

"I am," replied Bert coldly, rising also. "That man was my father! I swore on his dead body that I would give back the knife to its owner. Keep it Oulan, alias Jackson, South Australian miner, for it is *yours!*"

"Mine," gasped Oulan, an awful pallor creeping over his face, "you mistake, you—ah!" he cried, pressing his hand to his side, dropping the glass he held on the table, "that dagh!—that fatal dagh!" he cried, as he gazed with starting eyes at the ruby fluid which flowed in a ruddy stream across the pure white damask cloth, encircling the dagh in its course. "That knife! Ah, Heaven! have not the years of agony and remorse which I have suffered expiated my crime? Am I to be brought into the prisoner's dock after eighteen years misery? No, no! I will die first! I never killed Guy Chatworth! never! never!"

His wild incoherent talk ceased, he dropped back in his chair, cowering as though he beheld something which terrified him, his face became livid and he muttered. "And you stand there, Guy Chatworth, accusing me in your silence! Stand back!" he cried, as he started to his feet and seized a decanter. "Back! do you hear? Don't approach me, or I shall go mad!—mad!" he shrieked, as he dashed the decanter on the ground, smashing it into a thousand fragments; then he continued, in a mumbling, hurried voice: "Yes! yes! I did kill you—I did—is that not enough? Ah!—my head! my head!"

He pressed his hands to his temples, swaying gently as he did so, then he continued: "Yes, I killed you—ah—h—air! in mercy sake, air! I am suffocating! Air!—air!"

He tottered, swayed, and then, with a low moan, fell face downwards on the table.

In the horrible stillness which reigned after his fall, Bert strode up to him, and shaking Oulan, said:

"Jackson, what have you to say in answer to my charge?"

But the wretched man never stirred, for he was beyond the pale of earthly justice.

Tristam Monke.

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THE ✦ QUEEN ✦ OF ✦ NIGHT.

By HEADON HILL,

Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," "The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

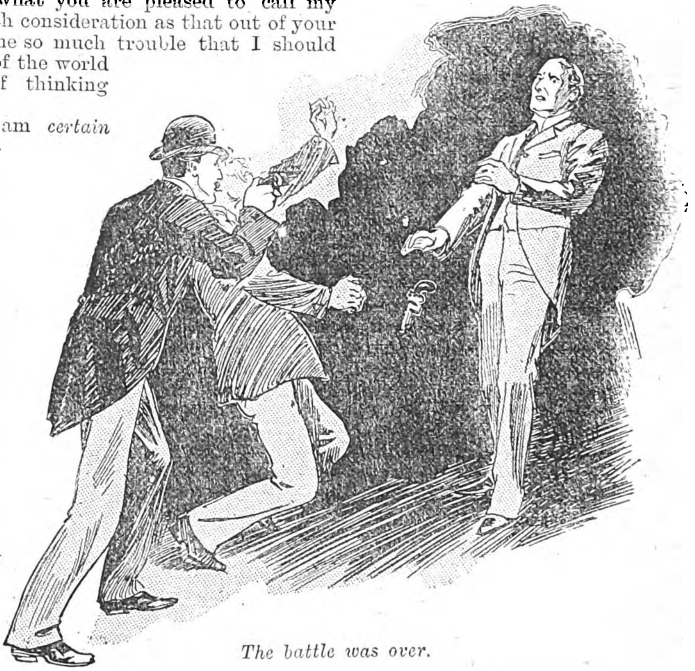
A Narrow Shave.

I do not know if I shall be believed, but it is a solemn fact that the glint of those murderous eyes behind the pistol barrel brought me positive relief. There had been too much hole-and-corner mystery in my life during the last few days to suit my temperament, and I welcomed the change that gave me an open foe at last, even though he had me at a disadvantage that threatened instant death.

"I do not profess to pit cunning against that of a professional criminal," said I, for his taunt had goaded me, "but if you kill me there will be one left who will prove your match. Your career is as good as ended, and you know it."

He laughed scornfully. "I am most assuredly going to kill you," he said. "That is what you are here for. But as to the second proposition—that your friend Kennard will avenge you by ending what you are pleased to call my career—pray put any such consideration as that out of your head. You have given me so much trouble that I should not wish you to go out of the world with the satisfaction of thinking that."

"I don't *think* it: I am *certain* of it. Kennard has as good as broken up your combination already," I replied defiantly. I saw vaguely that if I could prolong the wrangle by enticing him to gloat over his prospective victory, I might reduce the enormous odds at present in his favour. My own six-shooter was ready to hand in my pocket, but, covered as I was with his, I dared make no movement towards it. My only chance lay in creating a diversion, or in seizing some unexpected advantage before he tired of letting his jaw tackle run.



The battle was over.

He would have been wiser to have shot me as I stood, but his malicious desire that I should die miserable got the better of his prudence. "I can see, my thick-pated sailor, that I shall have to convince you that you are not playing with babies," he hissed. "Know then that it is now forty hours since six inches of cold steel settled Kennard's hash once for all. The land-crabs on the beach at Leghorn have made a mess of his identity by now—just as the deep-sea ones will be spoiling your ingenuous features ten minutes hence. We do not leave traces, my mates and I. The excellent Dicey here knows me too well to blab, and as for the Italians—well, they are all wanted for various crimes already, and are too highly paid to talk about a piece of work that would be as bad for them as for me. I did not choose my crew among the slums of Naples on account of their moral rectitude, you will understand. So you see, Forrester, that Zavertal and I shall soon be busy among the passengers of the *Queen of Night*, with no prying eyes and ears to obstruct us. Shall I take any inquiries from you to Miss Challenor—as to the state of her health?"

The news of Kennard's murder, and the thought that Aline would soon be at the mercy of these diabolical wretches, staggered me for a moment; but, seeing that my dear girl's only hope of life lay in my besting him now, I made a mighty effort to control myself and still to fight for delay. All this time Dicey remained flattened out against the wall, leaving a clear line for Vizard's pistol, but he was in an uncomfortable attitude from which I hoped much.

"I may be powerless to prevent your next crimes," I said, replying to the arch-villain, "but they will be your last. Do you imagine that I have no friends who will make inquiry for me? I shall be traced on board this vessel, which it will be proved was hired or bought by you."

"Don't make any such mistake," retorted Vizard. "The trap was baited by my own people, and I don't suppose that you, with your precious amateur-detective sharpness, told anyone where you were going. And if you did it is all one, for who are you but an escaped lunatic from the Convent of Santa Lucia? Our story, that you hid yourself on board the *Miranda*, and afterwards jumped overboard in a frenzy, will be so circumstantial that your disappearance will be accounted for in the most natural manner, I can promise you."

It was true enough, and I could have gnashed my teeth with rage at my folly in believing Mayfield's specious lies. With Kennard and myself out of the way every source of accusation against the "firm" would have been scotched, and their system might be carried on indefinitely—long after the victims of the present voyage had been forgotten. I was about to bid him shoot and be done with it, when Dicey blurted out a foc'sle oath at his constrained position.

"Why don't you plump the lead into him, Mister, and give us a rest?" he added. "I'm getting stiff-jointed—spreadeagled against this cursed wall."

"Clear out, then, and go on deck," said Vizard. "It is time the course was attended to, and I want to tease Captain Forrester a little more before I finish him. He must hear how his sweetheart is to fare first."

The subordinate scoundrel slouched forward to the companion-ladder, to which he ought to have had a perfectly clear path without interfering with his employer's aim. But by some clumsiness he passed to the right instead of to the left of the mast alongside of which Vizard had stationed himself, and thus momentarily came between us. My chance had come. Vizard shouted at him, with an imprecation to stand aside, but he was too late. I sprang forward, and clutching Dicey by the back used him as a shield, while with my right hand I drew my pistol. Simultaneously Vizard fired, hoping, I suppose, to hit some part of me that was not hidden by Dicey's body, but in the fluster he miscalculated and the shot took effect in my human armour-plate. The skipper of the *Miranda* drooped limply against me, but still holding him I fired over his shoulder and hit Vizard in the right arm. The battle was over. His revolver fell harmlessly to the floor.

Allowing Dicey to sink down in a huddled heap I aimed straight for Vizard's head. He glared at me like a wounded tiger, the blood pouring from his wrist, and for one second I thought he was going to spring at me. But controlling himself with an effort that sent a muscular spasm rippling over his handsome fiendish face, he even forced his features into a smile.

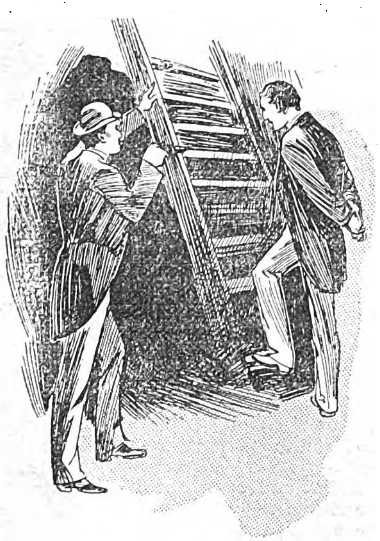
"The honours of war are with you, Captain," he said. "What is to be the programme?"

"You will right about face and stand with your back to me, and your face to the cabin wall," I said. "And keep your hands joined behind you."

Somewhat to my surprise he obeyed, and walking up to him I felt him all over in case he should have a second weapon. Sure enough he had a long clasp dagger, of which I relieved him; and then, after picking up his dropped pistol, I bade him precede me up the companion. Arrived on deck, a hasty glance showed that one of the Italians was at the wheel on the bridge, while the other sailor was lounging in the bows. The engineer was presumably attending to his duties below.

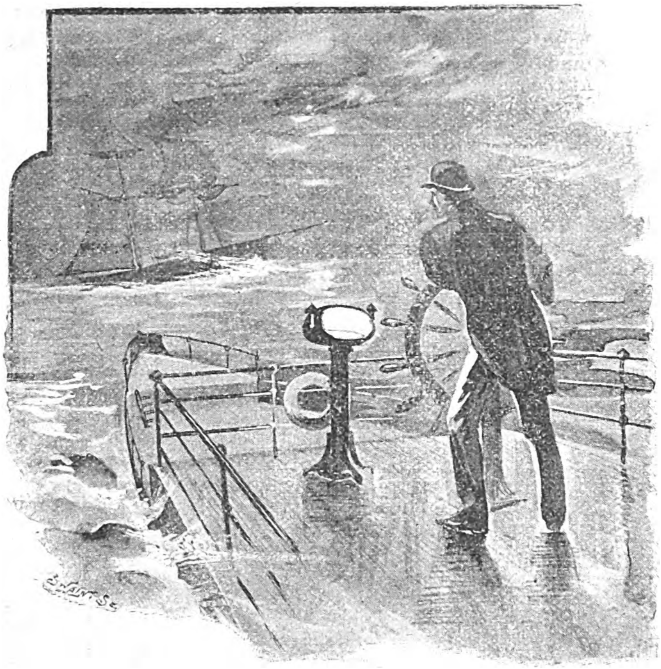
"Now," I said, pointing to a coil of rope lying under the bulwarks just forward of the bridge, "go and sit on that rope. The first movement you make, or the first attempt to speak to the Italians, and you are a dead man. The moon is full, and I shan't miss."

He shrugged his shoulders, and sitting down on the coil began to bind up his wound with a handkerchief. Without relaxing my watch on him I then went up on to the bridge, and taking the fellow at the wheel by the collar slung him down on to the deck, giving him to understand by a plentiful display of my revolver that he had to sit still on the opposite side to Vizard. The man in the bows seemed to have grasped the situation and discreetly remained where he was, while the engineer was attending to his duties below in happy ignorance of what was going on on deck. Then, with a glance at the binnacle to see that the course was right for Cagliari, I took the wheel, pistol in hand and ready to use it on very small provocation.



He obeyed.

For several hours the *Miranda* plodded on without any demand on me arising beyond unceasing vigilance and an occasional twist to the spokes of the wheel. Vizard sat quiet on the coil of rope, and from his attitude seemed to slumber, though I knew better than that. The man's subtle brain, I had no doubt, was already hard at work devising schemes for besting me, or at least for escape, before I handed him over to the law.



Came staggering athwart our course.

The two Italian sailors gave no trouble, but stretched themselves in a sleep that as like as not was genuine, while of the stricken Dicey there was no sign, and I did not know whether he was alive or dead. The engineer made himself acquainted with the change of skippers shortly after I took the wheel by protruding his head from the stoke-hole, to quickly withdraw it before my levelled revolver; but he showed no resentment, and when I tested his subservience by giving him an order on the engine-room bell it was promptly obeyed.

So matters were when, at about two in the morning, a lubberly brigantine came staggering athwart our course, and by wrongly porting her helm at a critical moment very nearly brought about a collision. For half a minute the steering of the *Miranda* claimed my undivided attention, but though it was touch-and-go, my efforts successfully averted the danger, and the brigantine went on her way in safety. But her clumsiness had a serious result. When I looked again at the spot below me where Vizard should have been, it was vacant, nor could I see him anywhere on deck.

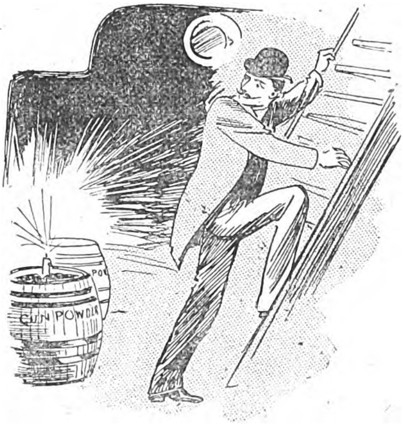
It will be readily seen that his disappearance did not add to my comfort. I did not know whether he was still on board or had managed to leap on to the brigantine as she shaved our counter. She had passed so close that I thought it just possible he might have done so; but, on the other hand, it was more than probable that he had only taken advantage of my preoccupation to conceal himself somewhere out of range of my pistol with a view to hatching some fresh devilry. He might have slipped down the companion to the cuddy, or into the stoke-hole, and I had now to be prepared for a sudden attack from any dark corner. I had removed the weapons from his person, it was true, but that was no reason why there should not be more below.

I steered onwards, literally keeping my eyes all round my head. Unfortunately the moon's light had become fitful, being obscured now and again by passing clouds, but it was nearly always bright enough to distinguish moving objects on deck, had there been such. Yet for over an hour I saw nothing, and heard nothing to prove Vizard's presence on board. At the end of that time the rattling of the tackle on the davit that carried our only boat told me what was up.

By some means Vizard had contrived to lower the boat, and was leaving the steamer; but his wounded arm suggested that he must have help, and I waited anxiously till the boat should appear astern to see if he was accompanied. In a second or two I caught sight of her, bobbing in the *Miranda's* wake, and the secret of Vizard's escape was solved by the presence of a second person who was pulling the oars. At first I thought this must be Dicey, but remembering the grievous nature of his wound my suspicions turned to the engineer and were instantly confirmed by my giving a signal to the engine-room which met with no response.

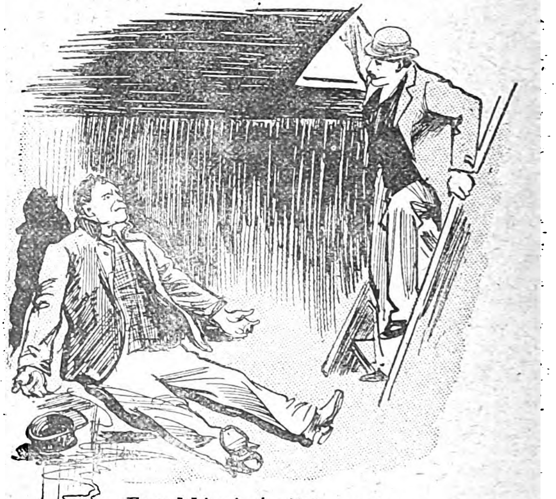
It was clear enough now what had happened. While I was occupied in averting a collision with the brigantine, Vizard had bolted into the stoke-hole hatch, and had enlisted the aid of the engineer in lowering the boat, which they must have reached unseen by me while the moon was under a cloud. On the whole I was rather relieved than otherwise to be quit of the strain of watching for an attack, and when Vizard shouted a derisive farewell from the fast receding boat I returned it with interest. I made no doubt that on the information I should lay he would be speedily traced wherever he might land, and in any case his flight seemed to be a confession that his power for evil was broken.

The only thing that troubled me now was the need of someone to look after the engines and furnace. At present, in the open sea, so long as the fire did not want replenishing, and a full head of steam was on, I was all right, but the time would soon come when I should either have to lash the helm and go and stoke the fire myself, or make one of the sailors do it for me, both of which alternatives had their risks. I rather wondered that Vizard, by raking out the fires before his departure, had not put me to the inconvenience of having to visit the stoke-hole at once; but I supposed that in his haste to get away even his fiendish ingenuity had overlooked the point.



I rushed up on deck.

I did him sore injustice, as I was soon to learn. The head of steam lasted for an hour or so after he had gone, and then I could tell by the slackening speed that the furnace must be coaled if we were not to come to a standstill. The two Italian sailors were still sleeping, and thinking them best left as they were, I ran down to do the business myself. The engine-room hatch was a mere manhole, with a stout ladder running down to the well in which the machinery played, a second ladder leading to the stokehole below. I had nearly reached the bottom of this second descent when I noticed that the stoke-hole was lit up with other light than what came from the furnace door, and looking for the source, I found it in a candle close to the side of the vessel. But that was not the worst. *The candle was stuck in a keg of gunpowder, which the flame was already nearing.*



Found him in a sitting posture.

Instinctively I rushed up on deck, for I had seen that the explosion was too near at hand for me to attempt to move the candle, and it was well that I did so. I had scarcely put the length of the ship between me and the engine-hatch when the powder went off with a mighty roar, the deck planks over the spot upheaved and flew in the air, and the sound of rushing water told me that the steamer's side was shattered—that she was sinking.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Dr. Zavertal will Prescribe."

A hasty inspection of the engine-room showed that the *Miranda* had not more than half an hour to float. The explosion, as no doubt Vizard had intended, had torn a great rent in her side, through which the sea was pouring in. The two sailors were running about crazed with fright, and were quite useless in the emergency, though it is doubtful if anything could have been done had they kept cool, so great was the damage. The one boat was gone, and there was no time to build a raft.

Finding our case hopeless, my first impulse was to go and see if Dicey was alive, so that in that event I might bring him on deck and so give him a better chance. Ruffian as he was, I did not like the idea of his dying like a rat in a trap without knowing what was going on. On entering the cuddy I found him in a sitting posture against the cabin wall in a great pool of blood, the loss of which had made him delirious, for he was babbling unintelligibly. With a good deal of trouble I hoisted him up the companion, and once on deck the fresh air seemed to revive him a little. He had wit enough left to see that the steamer was fast going down by the head, and he allowed me to make him fast to a spare boom on the chance of keeping him afloat till picked up.

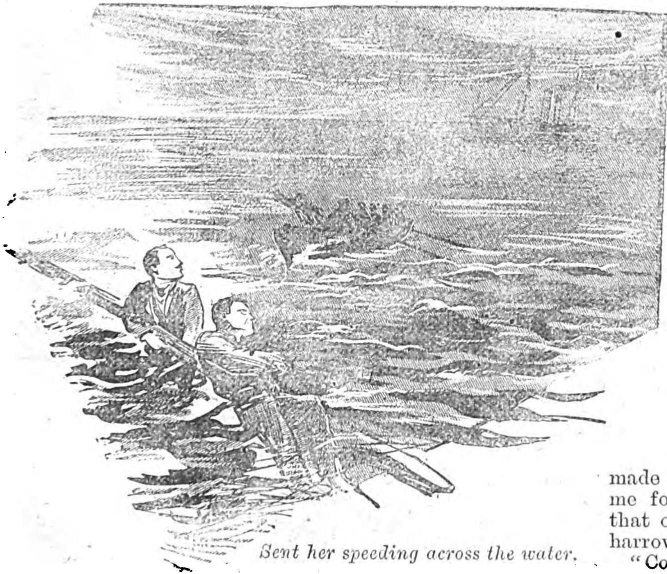
I had scarcely got him secured to the spar when the *Miranda* pitched forward, recovered herself, and then pitched again, bows under, and went down like a stone, leaving me hanging on to the spar. We must have gone down about twenty feet with the suction, but soon rose, myself none the worse for the dip, but Dicey more dead than alive. The two sailors must have sunk at once, for they were never seen again, and small loss either.

My only hope now lay in the chance that some vessel might come our way before hunger and thirst prevailed, and I scanned the horizon anxiously for a sail or smoke. It had been daylight for some time, but the dawn had come up with a haze that up to the sinking of the vessel had limited the range of vision to a mile or so, and it was therefore with a thankful heart that I saw a great steamer heading right for us not more than half a mile away. A second glance caused me to rub my eyes and stare harder still. There was no mistaking those creamy funnels and tapering, gilded bows. It was the *Queen of Night*, steering to the south-east, on a course that would take her to Alexandria.

She came steadily on at fifteen knots, and it soon became apparent that the spar and its occupants had been seen from the bridge, for at a distance of two hundred yards I heard the engine-bell ring "Stop," and immediately afterwards a boat shot out from the steamer's side. Though strong arms sent her speeding across the water, to me she seemed to crawl, so eager was I for the news she would bring. As she dashed up to the spar I saw that the bo'sun was in charge. When I sang out to him by name he looked frightened—rather to my surprise, for we had been very good friends—and then I remembered that he had probably been told that I was mad.

Dicey had relapsed into unconsciousness, and, at my request, he was first taken into the boat, the bo'sun not addressing me directly during the operation beyond remarking that "it was a rum go." Further, after I had got into the boat, and all the way to the ship, he preserved a reticence which seemed a little singular, even if he did imagine me to be a harmless lunatic. But I managed to extract from him the one piece of information for which my heart was hungering—that there had been no more deaths on board, and that, so far as he knew, all the passengers were well. After that he was welcome, for all I cared, to content himself with remarking that "it was the rummiest cruise he ever heard tell on."

The hour was still so early that there were but few people about to witness our arrival. As soon as the boat came alongside, the ladder was thrown to us, and among the faces peering over the rail in undisguised curiosity, I recognised that of McIntyre, who had superseded me in the command. I was glad he was on deck, for I knew him for a decent, honest fellow, and had no thought but that when he heard my story and explanation he would allow me to reinstate myself without demur.

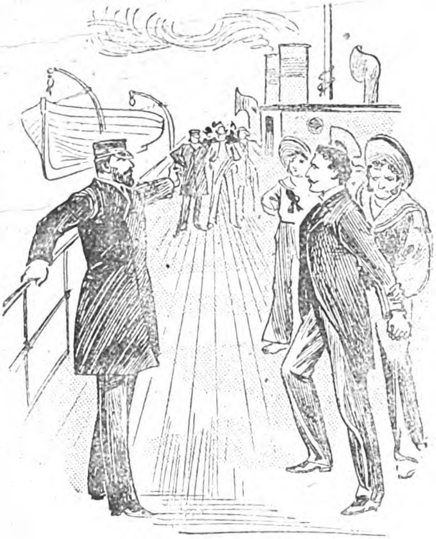


Sent her speeding across the water.

Imagine, then, my surprise when, the moment I was over the side half-a-dozen seamen closed round me, evidently acting under orders, and McIntyre, ignoring my proffered hand, instructed them to "use me gently." That specious scoundrel Zavertal had clearly lied so circumstantially as to get himself believed, and my troubles were not over yet.

"This is a nice sort of welcome to give to your captain, McIntyre," I said, "especially after he has been twice nearly murdered."

He cast his eyes down shamefacedly, as though he didn't like his job, then spoke up boldly: "Don't make it harder for me, sir, than it is already. I have taken command by cabled authority from the owners. And I have the Doctor's instructions that you—that you are to be taken care of."



Pointed to a little group.

"How can that be?" I exclaimed. "Doctor Zavertal's last move was to have me wrongly shut up in an asylum at Genoa. How was he to know that you were going to pick me up at sea from a craft which his associate and fellow-villain, Vizard, sank not an hour ago?"

McIntyre pointed to a little group that was standing watching us from the door of the surgery, and said simply: "He saw you through his field-glass."

A very probable explanation, but I was too amazed then by what I saw to heed his words. The group comprised not only Zavertal, with his features composed into an expression of friendly concern, but Vizard, looking compassionately dignified, and in the guise of "General Waldo" *Kennard, whom I believed to have been murdered by, and while pursuing, the man with whom he now stood in amicable converse.* The sight so staggered me that I nearly called out to upbraid the American for going over to the enemy, or for having been hand and glove with them all along, but, luckily, I stopped in time.

I recollected Kennard's expressed intention of preserving the Waldo disguise undiscovered so that he might use it again if occasion arose, and it was possible that he was still fooling them successfully in his old character. But then what of the man whom Vizard by his own boasting confession—made when he thought he was on the point of quieting me for ever—had slain on the beach at Leghorn? Was that only a gratuitous lie, fabricated for the purpose of harrowing the last moments of one who had crossed him?

"Come, sir," said McIntyre, as I paused, undecided what to do; "we shan't better matters by standing here. I have had a comfortable deck-cabin prepared for you next the surgery, and you will receive every consideration till you can lay your case before the Consul at Alexandria or the authorities at home—whichever you prefer."

"Very well," I said, raising my voice, "but before I go to the cabin I should like to know how that man"—pointing to Vizard—"explains his being in the boat from which I suppose you rescued him?"

"Better not rake that up now," said McIntyre. "Wait till you are calmer and rested, then I'll go into it with you myself."

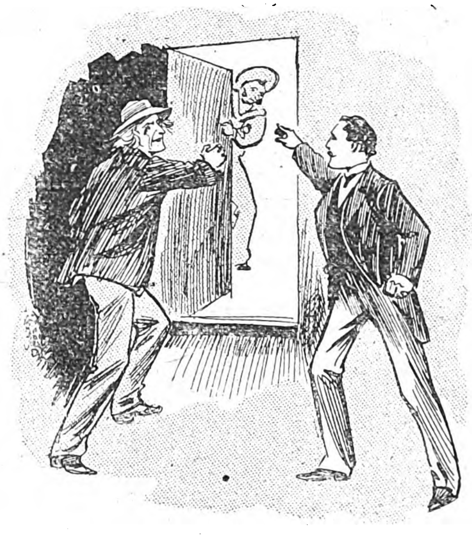
I could see that he was only trying to humour me as a madman, but I was determined to know what version that villain had given of the occurrences of the night.

"I insist upon being told—as a condition of giving you no trouble," I replied.

"Well," said McIntyre, ill at ease, "he says he escaped from a small steam-yacht that he had hired at Naples to try and catch us at Cagliari. Says you concealed yourself aboard her, and he quit because you were shooting at the crew and threatening to blow up the vessel."

It was no use protesting, and this counter-charge had been half-expected by me, since I saw that Vizard had been picked up. I recognised that I should have to wait till I could collect rebutting testimony, and difficult enough that would be if Kennard was against me. There was one stipulation, though, that I had to make, even if I had to fight for it.

"Very well," I said, "I shall have to deal with Mr. Vizard later, but if you wish for peace and quietness on this ship, McIntyre, I should strongly advise you not to allow Doctor Zavertal to come near me. I am perfectly well in mind and body, and if he comes to my cabin under the pretext of 'attending' me, I won't engage to control myself."



In real or affected terror he rushed from the cabin.

Zavertal, who had overheard, beckoned McIntyre to where he was standing with "Waldo" and Vizard, and said a few words in an undertone. When McIntyre returned to me, he informed me that my wishes should be met, and added:

"Look here, Forrester, I'm blowed if I like all this, so I have insisted on one thing on my own hook. You are to be allowed to have any of the passengers—that is the male passengers—whom you may select to come and see you—provided, of course, that they are willing."

This was a real good turn, and I thanked McIntyre warmly. I knew well enough that Zavertal would not have consented to the arrangement if he had not had some ulterior object in view, but at any rate, it was a better prospect than complete isolation. I promptly named "General Waldo" as the only visitor I cared to receive at present, and permitted my escort to see me to my cabin. It was one of the best in the ship, being between the library and Zavertal's cabin, and there would have been no fault to find with it, had it not been for the two seamen who took up a position at the door as gaolers.

Two other men had been told off to bring my own property from the Captain's room, and I had just finished arranging the things when "Waldo" entered, shutting the door behind him. I sprang forward, primed with eager questions, but stopped in amazement at his mode of addressing me. He spoke in the pronounced American twang which he had adopted to suit his disguise.

"Wa'al, Captain," he began, "this is a tarnation tall knock-out, I'm thinking. But Emerson C. Waldo isn't the man to go back on a pal in distress. You and me was tol'able close acquainted before we parted at Genoa, and I take it as an honour that you should include me in your visiting list. Been feeling bad in your head, the Doctor was telling me. What can I do to perk your sperrits up? I guess a yarn of the Wild West is powerful soothing to the jaded cerebrum. Shall I take the floor with my little skirmish with the Navajo hoss-thieves?"

So he meant to ignore, even in private, all that had passed between us at Genoa and on that eventful train-journey, and intended in his assumed character to treat me as a lunatic to be humoured and cajoled. All that I could make of it was that he must have been bribed by Zavertal and Vizard to side with them and swear that all I might say of my adventures in his company was the creation of a deluded brain. Too sick at heart and weary to search for further meanings, this, the only explanation of his conduct that presented itself, upset me altogether.

"If that is the way you are going to talk, for God's sake clear out before I do you an injury," I cried. "I thought you were a true man when I asked to see you, but I want no traitor here."

In real or affected terror he rushed from the cabin, leaving me in a whirl of mingled rage and despair. As I grew somewhat calmer my mind turned to Aline, and to trying to devise some scheme, by buying over my gaolers or otherwise, of communicating with her. The passengers, I knew by the sounds on deck outside, were up and about by this time, and it was maddening to think that she might be passing and repassing within a few feet of me and yet be ignorant that I was so near. It was quite likely that steps had been taken to prevent the general body of passengers from hearing that I was on board.

I was still debating how best to effect my purpose, when the sound of a colloquy proceeding at the surgery-door, next to mine, attracted my attention.

First a voice which I recognised as that of the chief stewardess, said: "Is the Doctor in?"

"What is it?" came the reply in Zavertal's tones.

"I came to tell you, sir, that one of the ladies has been taken ill," said the woman. "It is Miss Challenor, who has number seventeen state-room. She has fainted, and is quite unconscious."

"Ah, indeed," was the glibly-spoken answer that froze me to the heart. "Tell Mrs. Brinkworth, who I suppose is with Miss Challenor, that Dr. Zavertal will be down directly—*and will prescribe.*"

(*To be continued.*)

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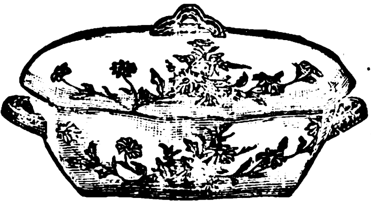

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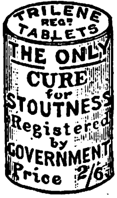

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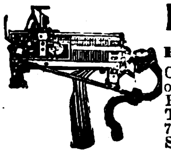

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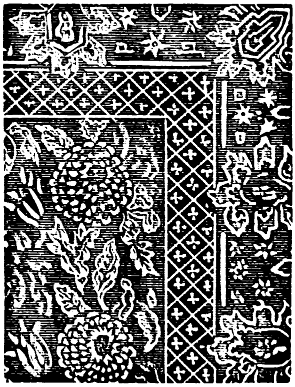

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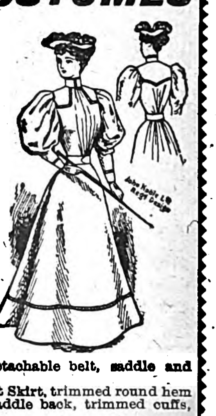
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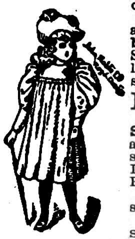

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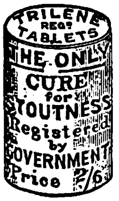

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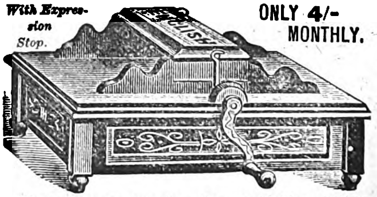

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Short Stories

GAY AND GRAVE

Edited by C. Arthur Pearson.

No. 360.] [One Penny.

For the Week ending November 23rd, 1895.

A SISTER'S DEVOTION.

THEY had never seen each other before they became fellow passengers on the big Indian liner that was conveying them to Bombay—he to rejoin his regiment, after a period of six months' leave, and she to return to her father and elder sister after an absence of nearly ten years.

To the young girl just fresh from school there had been a wondrous fascination about the handsome, good-looking officer, who knew all about the part of India she was going to, and could give her a very graphic insight to the pleasures and gaieties which, as the daughter of a man holding a high official position, as was the case with her father, Mr. Atherstone, she would find awaiting her.

Under these circumstances it was not to be wondered at that what had at the commencement been merely a pleasant friendship between Lieutenant Charles Tripney and Miss Gracie Atherstone rapidly developed into a mutual attachment, and before the voyage was half over they were engaged to each other.

At the time when this story commences they were strolling up and down the deck agreeably engaged in discussing their future plans.

"Do you know I can hardly believe it is real sometimes?" the girl said.

"Believe what, dearest?"

"That you and I are actually engaged, you know."

"Yes, and I hope shall be married some day, too."

"Oh, Charlie, suppose anything should happen to separate us."

"But it shan't, my darling. My uncle of whom I have told you, has always said that when I marry he will make me a handsome allowance, and he has often told me I am to be his heir. Of course, there is your father——"

"Oh, I don't think the dear old dad will object; but don't you think I ought to tell him as soon as I see him?"

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"I've been thinking about that, little woman, and I think it would be better if the news came from me; I dare say I can manage to get two or three days from my Colonel, on urgent and special business, and I could do the journey up and back in three days."

"Just as you think best, Charlie, but I may tell my sister Maisie, mayn't I?"

"By all means, my dear, and I hope she won't be disappointed at your marrying a lieutenant in a line regiment."

The important question having thus been settled, the conversation took a more amatory turn, to repeat which would not advance this story in any way; suffice it to say the voyage ended without any exciting incident.

On landing the lovers each went their separate way—he to the headquarters of his regiment, and she in charge of the lady who had acted as chaperon on the voyage out to her father's home in the Himalayas.

The meeting between father and daughter was somewhat constrained, ten years being a long period of separation; but if not demonstrative in his welcome, he was unmistakably glad to have her with him again, and she longed to tell him of her newly-found happiness. At any rate, she could make a confidante of her sister Maisie—a tall, handsome girl, who had been much sought after in marriage, but who still remained heart whole, as she said, although if the truth was told there had been an episode in her life when she had been as deeply in love as her younger sister, but a misunderstanding had taken place and the affair was broken off. The result was that her whole nature had so changed that for some time past she had enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most notorious flirts at the station; which was saying a good deal.

Such was the confidante to whom the younger girl was about to outpour the story of the happiness which had almost overwhelmed her.

The two girls were seated on the day of the younger's arrival in the deep verandah of their father's chalet, that being the only place where it was possible to feel the slightest relief from the excessive heat of the tropical sun.

It was easy to see at a glance that they were sisters, but the fresh, fair complexion of the younger girl, and the bright, happy expression on her face, was in marked contrast to the sallow and hard look on the face of her elder companion.

"I declare it's quite a comfort to have you out, child; I am getting sick and tired of India and everything belonging to it—I do wish papa would retire and go home."

"I always thought from your letters that you liked the life out here, but I shouldn't care to live here altogether, I think—no, I am sure I should not," she continued after a moment's pause.

The elder girl looked at her intently, and Gracie felt herself blushing violently.

"You had better tell me all about it, child."

"Tell you all about what, dear?"

"Oh, you little goose! your tell-tale face betrayed your secret at once. Is he very nice? and are you going to tell papa?"

"He is coming here himself to see papa."

"Goodness gracious, child, what do you mean? Why, you only landed a week ago!"

"Now, Maisie, I will tell you all about it; and then you can judge for yourself."

The elder sister listened to the recital with an air of interest, and then said abruptly: "And do you think he won't see somebody else before long?"

"Oh, you misjudge him, you do indeed. I am sure that he never would."

"There, don't be silly, child," the elder sister said in a kinder tone than she had before adopted; "I didn't mean anything. But things are different out here to what they are in England you will find."

"Tell me, Maisie, have you ever been *really* in love? I don't mean——"

"In love? Of course I have," said Maisie with a hard laugh. "We all do here in India; it is the only thing to live for; but it doesn't last long, that's one thing."

"Oh, Maisie, it is dreadful to hear you talk like that; you don't mean it, do you?"

"Oh, you musn't believe all I say, dear. It's a way I've got; and now tell me all about it again."

Nothing loath, the younger girl told the story over again, and was so interested in her subject that she did not notice her sister seemed more or less bored as she went on. Once only she evinced any real interest, and that was when the name of the uncle of her sister's lover was mentioned.

"Maurice Fitzgerald, did you say? Why that must be the commissioner who is going to inspect the station next month. I heard papa say so; I wonder," she went on with a sneer, "your devoted lover did not impart this information to you."

"I am sure he did not know, otherwise he would have told me."

"Well, I shouldn't worry about it, anyway, if I were you; and now let's talk about something else if you don't mind."

This was hardly the way in which poor Gracie had anticipated her secret would have been received, and she made up her mind not to revert to the subject again unless her sister did.

One great source of comfort to her was her lover's letters, for he managed to find time to write to her nearly every day, and in the very first, after he had seen his uncle, he told her with delight that he was going to visit the district in the course of a few weeks, when he had promised to get introduced to her so that he could form his own opinion.

"He is awfully pleased with your photograph," the letter continued, "and so I do not fear for the result; and do you know he has been good enough to say that, if I like, he will arrange for me to exchange into a regiment stationed at home, and so we can be married almost immediately. I am afraid India will not suit your health for long, and so I shall most certainly avail myself of his kindness, if your father raises no objection. I am sorry to say I shall not be able to get away until after next month to come and see your father, but perhaps it is just as well. You and my uncle will have met before then."

"I wonder what Maisie would say now if I told her. I knew Charlie would not keep anything from me," Gracie thought to herself.

The weeks went on, and Gracie was not only becoming used to her new surroundings, but was, as might have been expected, enjoying to the full the succession of balls and other gaieties to which she was being continually invited. One thing, however, made her very uneasy at times, and that was the intimate friendship which seemed to exist between her elder sister and a certain Captain Hylton, of the well-known regiment, the Blue Dragoons.

She herself had been introduced to him soon after her arrival from England, and attracted evidently by her fresh, youthful beauty, he had endeavoured to pay her attention; but from the very first she had taken a dislike to the man, and made no secret of her aversion towards him. Young as she was she was not without a certain amount of experience, and from what she heard it was quite plain that her antipathy towards the gallant captain was not without reasonable foundation.

He had already figured conspicuously in a certain notorious divorce case, and altogether enjoyed a none too desirable reputation.

More than once the younger sister felt impelled to say what she thought to the elder one, but after her first few days together, a certain amount of estrangement seemed to have sprung up between them, and there was an absence of that sisterly confidence and affection for which the younger had hoped before she arrived.

Each went their own way, in fact, and the less they were together the better they seemed to agree.

The day of the great social event of the season had at last arrived—the Governor's Ball—and for once the sisters had a subject in common on which to hold an animated discourse.

On arriving at the Governor's house they found Captain Hylton awaiting them, and the familiar air of proprietorship with which he approached the elder sister, and assisted her to remove her wraps, caused Gracie a pang of uneasiness. Once within the brilliant splendour of the ballroom she found herself a centre of admiration, and it was evident she would not have the mortification of having to look on whilst the others danced.

Throughout the greater part of the night she only caught sight of her sister once, and then she was waltzing with Captain Hylton.

A longer interval than usual between the dances gave an opportunity of sitting out in the verandah for a while, of which the majority present availed themselves, and Gracie's partner, having found her a snug corner, had left her to go and seek his partner for the next dance, the music for which had just commenced. She was wondering to herself how long her partner would be before he discovered her retreat, when she heard voices on the terrace outside; evidently the couple thought the verandah was deserted.

The listener could only make out scraps of the conversation in a man's voice—a voice she recognised as that of Captain Hylton, but he was evidently pressing his companion to elope with him. Who she might be she did not dare to think, when suddenly her worst fears were realised, as she heard her sister's voice in reply agreeing to the proposed arrangement, and then saying wearily: "And now take me inside, please."

The last strains of the waltz were dying away before Gracie seemed to recover her senses. She sat quite still, feeling that she was trembling violently all over, and yet utterly incapable of doing anything.

"Ah, here you are, Miss Atherstone, I have been looking for you everywhere." The words roused her to herself, as her intended partner for the dance which had just terminated made his appearance; at the same time a crowd of dancers filed into the verandah.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me dancing any more to-night. It's very silly, of course, but a feeling of faintness came over me just now, and I shall go home. Would you very kindly take me to the door and tell my sister why I am leaving early?"

Having wrapped her cloak closely round her she stood in the shadow of the big portico awaiting her sister and their joint chaperon. Just then a man passed out and said hurriedly: "Four o'clock at the bottom of the road. I am just off to pack; I find the mail does stop this morning after all, and not to-morrow. Don't be late or we shall miss it," and without waiting for her to reply he was gone.

"Will Maisie never come," she said to herself, as the minutes went by. "Ah, here she is at last," and the two ladies appeared.

"What on earth is the matter, child? You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"I feel a little faint, that's all. I shall be better when I get home."

The journey was accomplished in absolute silence, each being busy with her own thoughts; but with what a difference!

The big clock was chiming out the three-quarters, when a girl, wearing a long cloak with a hood which effectively obscured her features, stole noiselessly out of Mr. Atherstone's house, and without looking either to the right or left, walked hurriedly down the road.

In the dim morning light she could just see a jampan with extra bearers, and close by a man holding the reins of a smart-looking service pony.

"There is no time to waste," he said, as he hastily assisted her into into the conveyance, and the next moment had sprung upon his pony's back. The path was steep and narrow, but the bearers made good progress, and reached the station just as the mail was coming in.

"Another minute or two and we should have been too late," was the gentleman's remark.

For answer, the lady threw back the hood of her cloak, and revealed to his astonished gaze the features, not of Maisie, but Gracie Atherstone!

"What on earth is the meaning of this?" he exclaimed.

"Simply that you mistook me for my sister in the doorway last night, Captain Hylton, and your blunder has, I am thankful to say, saved her from herself."

"We have both been very foolish, Miss Atherstone, I admit, but thanks to you nobody need ever know anything of it; there is a train back (just due) that will set you down at your house in less time than the bearers could, and I must continue my journey alone; perhaps it is all for the best," he said, with an attempt at a laugh.

Just at that moment the whistle gave an admonitory shriek, the Captain took his seat, and Gracie found herself alone—not exactly alone though, an elderly man—an Englishman—was standing close by, and having regarded her features intently for a moment, turned away, muttering to himself: "Good God! what an escape!"

On re-entering the house an hour later she managed to get to her room unnoticed, and then, thoroughly overwhelmed by the strain and excitement she had gone through, she gave way to a fit of violent hysterics, culminating later on in the day in an attack of brain fever, from which she did not recover for several weeks.

When she regained consciousness for the first time, she was aware that her sister was sitting by her side, and, dazed as she was, she was impressed with the look of affectionate solicitude on her face, so totally different to what she had ever seen before.

"Don't talk, darling—at least, not yet; try and go to sleep again."

Poor child, she was too weak to make any resistance, and quietly did as she was told. "The crisis is past," the doctor said when he next saw her; "all she wants now is to recover strength. If there is any trouble on her mind—and from what I could gather in her moments of delirium there is—try and set it right."

From what had dropped in disjointed sentences from her sister's lips at various times, during the time the fever was at its height, she knew well enough what was ever present in her mind, and apart from that, had she not received a humble letter from Captain Hylton, explaining the whole thing.

One day when Gracie seemed strong enough to bear it, she made an open confession of her folly, and kissed her passionately at the conclusion. "You have been a guardian angel to me, Gracie, and I can never be sufficiently thankful to you. Let us never mention it again, dear; we will forget it ever happened."

"Are there any letters for me, Maisie?"

"Yes, dear, one—it came the day after you were taken so ill. Here it is."

The sick girl's face lighted up with pleasure as she recognised her lover's handwriting, and with trembling fingers she opened the envelope. It contained only a short note, but before she had read it through, her whole figure trembled convulsively, and then with a cry, as if in an agony of pain, she swooned away into a dead faint.

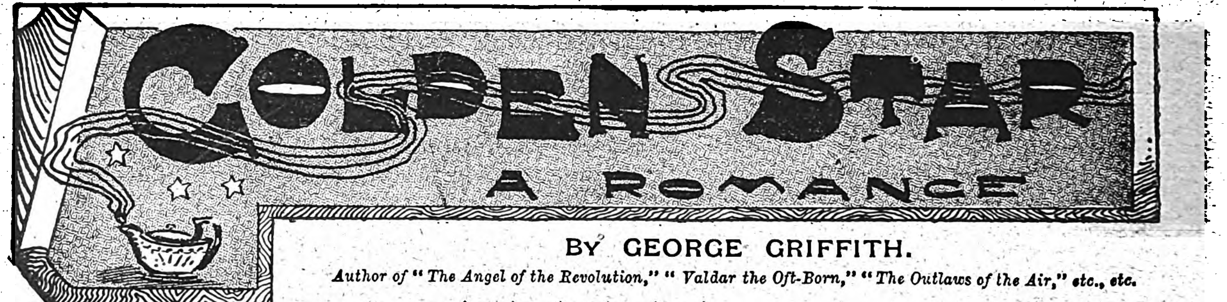
Mechanically the watcher took up the note, and this is what she read:

"I cannot, will not, believe it, but my uncle says he is sure he was not mistaken, and that the day before yesterday he saw you at Khirkee Station, in the early morning, with Captain Hylton, and that he even heard him say to you—but no, I will not repeat it; there must, I know, be some awful mistake, which a line from you can immediately clear up. Write me such a letter that I can show him.

Yours always lovingly, Charlie."

The letter dropped from her hands. After a while Gracie recovered from her faintness, but there was in her eyes a look that seemed to chill her sister to the very marrow. The shock had been too much for her, and although in course of time, as the doctor had predicted, she pulled through, her mind remained a blank. Gracie Atherstone was a perfectly harmless, but nevertheless incurable, lunatic.

Peter Parr.



GOLDEN STAR

A ROMANCE

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

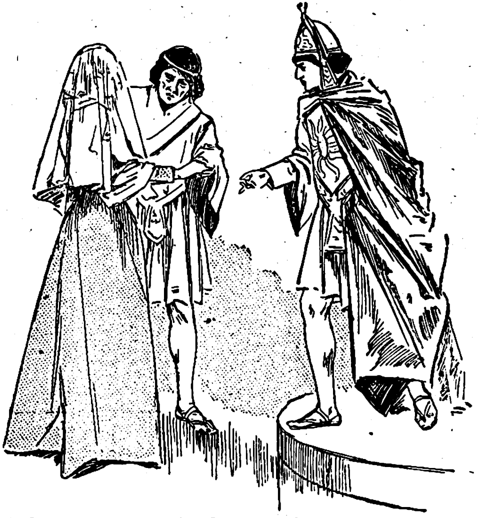
How the Soul of Golden Star Came Back.

When the two chairs had been brought in and placed according to my orders, I rose from my throne and led Joyful Star to the one on my left hand and placed her in it, still silent with the wonder and perplexity of what she had seen and heard since her eyes were opened. Then, seating myself again, I bade Tupac summon the Children of the Blood to take their places, and presently he ushered them in from the chambers that opened out of the great hall on either hand at the other end.

There were three score of them, the heads of the families of Ayllos whose blood was the purest and whose descent was most direct from the old nobility of my own days. Each of them, too, under the outward husk of his forlorn and degraded state had preserved unsullied the ancient faith and traditions of the Sacred Race, and against all appearances had steadfastly hoped for the fulfilment of the promises that had been given in the olden times. More than this, too, each had treasured, as a miser hoards his gold, the ever-growing legacy of hate which the oppression and contempt of the Spaniards and their meaner descendants had heaped up from generation to generation against the long-awaited day of vengeance which, as but two or three in that strange company alone knew, was now so near at hand.

Ever since I had revealed myself to them in the Hall of Gold they had been working for the end in view with the swift, subtle arts known only to those of their race, and already, from Quito in the north to Santiago in the south, tidings had gone forth that the day of deliverance was approaching, and that ere long the Rainbow Banner would be raised by the hands of him for whom the Children of the Sun had waited.

Each of the fathers of the people was dressed, as Tupac was, in the long forbidden garb of the ancient nobility, and each as he entered stopped in the centre of the hall and paid his homage before he went to his seat. Then when all were seated I ordered that the strangers should be brought in, and they were led into the midst of the silent assembly with their eyes still bandaged. Over Golden Star's head a veil had been thrown hiding her face, for it was my purpose that it should not be seen for the present, and how strangely this purpose worked you shall soon see.



I descended from the throne and went to meet her.

As she came up the middle of the hall, following Tupac who was leading her as obedient as a little child, I descended from the throne and went to meet her and led her to the seat on my right hand and placed her in it. Francis Hartness, the Professor, and Djama I left standing in the middle of the hall, each with one of Tupac's chosen guards beside him. When Golden Star was seated I stood up in front of the throne and said to those assembled, speaking in the ancient tongue:

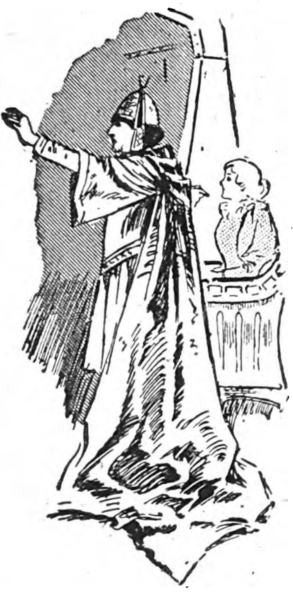
"Sons of the Blood and Fathers of the Oppressed, you know already how the promise that was made by our Father the Sun through the lips of his high priest, in the days when first the oppressors came, has been in part most faithfully and marvellously fulfilled. I—Vilcaroya, son of Huayni-Capac, son of the great Yupanqui-Inca, before whose throne-seat I am now standing alive in your presence, am he of whom it was said that one who should pass from life to life through the shadows of death, should grasp the sceptre of the divine Manco, and restore the ancient glory of the Children of the Sun. And with me, as you know, there was another, at whose call and for love of whom I dared the ordeal of the death-sleep and swore the oath which I have returned to the world of living men to fulfil. I have already given you some proof that I am what I say I am, for I have revealed to you secrets which were buried in the grave with me and in those faithful hearts which have been pulseless now for many generations.

"But now, that all things may be made plain to you and that no doubts may remain in your hearts to hinder the working of our sacred purpose, I have brought here before you witnesses of the wonders that have been worked—even those who wrought them themselves, that their own lips may tell you the story, and with them I have brought yet another witness who, though she cannot speak to you in our ancient tongue of which our Father, for his own wise purposes, has deprived her during her long sleep, will yet in her own person and even with silent lips be witness enough that I have not lied to you. Now let the eyes of the strangers be uncovered and their mouths opened that they may see and speak."

Even as the words left my lips they were obeyed, and at the same time I stretched out my right hand and raised the veil from the head of Golden Star and unloosed the bandage from her eyes.

A deep murmur of wonder ran round the hall; a sharp cry of amazement broke from Djama's lips, and the two others stared blankly about them. Then I raised my left hand to command silence, and, still speaking the ancient speech and pointing with my right hand to Golden Star, said:

“This, O Fathers of the People, is she who drank the death-draught with me. This is Cory-coyllur, daughter of Huayni-Capac and sister of the long-ago murdered Huascar, and my sister, too, since her great father was mine also. With her, as the tradition has told you, I plighted the marriage-troth before the altar in the Sanctuary of the Sun, and of that troth I would speak to you now. Such marriage is no longer lawful in the world to which we have returned, and in token of this our Father the Sun has sent this other likeness of Golden Star who sits upon my left hand to tell me that it may not be, and to make the message surer it has pleased him also to put into my heart a love for her differing from, though not greater than that which I have borne for Golden Star, and if my Father who has given me this love shall also look with kindness upon my longing, then Joyful Star, as I have named her, shall be my coya[*] and my queen, and Golden Star shall be her sister and mine, and I doubt not that in his own good time our Father will send her a fitting mate, that her heart may not be empty nor her life lonely.”



Then I raised my left hand to command silence.

As I said these last words I saw the eyes of all who were sitting in the chairs turn as if moved by one impulse and rest on Francis Hartness, standing strong and stately in the midst of the little group in the middle of the hall, overtopping the others by nearly a span, and crowned with his curling golden hair; and as I, too, looked at him a new thought came into my mind and I spoke aloud again and said:

“Yes, Brothers of the Blood, I read your thought. The stranger from the land which is the greatest of all lands in the world of to-day is a true son of the Sun, though not of our blood, for his heart is clean and his tongue is straight and his arm strong, and perchance it may please our Father to bring about that which he has put into our hearts.”

At this another murmur ran round the hall and every head was bowed in assent.

Now all this time the three Englishman had been standing patiently in the midst of the hall, looking about them at its splendours, and waiting till I should speak to them, for the Professor knew enough of the Quichua tongue to follow what I had been saying, and had told the others that I was speaking of them. Now I spoke to them in English and told them what I had brought them to the throne-room for, and then I had chairs placed for them at the top of the hall to my left hand.

When they had taken their places I asked the Professor to speak in Spanish to those assembled, and tell them whether or not the story of my return to life was true, and whether or not Golden Star had been found where Anda-Huillac and the priests had placed her, and had been like me restored to life by the arts of Djama his friend. This he did in few straight words, and after him Djama rose at my bidding and told them also what he had done. When he had finished I took the Llautu from my head and raised it above me with outstretched arms and said in a loud voice:

“If you, O Children of the Blood and the sons of the ancient Race, believe now that I am in truth Vilcaroya, son of Huayni-Capac, and lawful heir of the divine Manco from whom all the Incas of our race draw their royal blood, then bid me re-crown myself, and, so doing, swear to take me for your lord as my father was the lord of your fathers, or if any shall have yet doubt in his heart let him speak now or for ever be silent.”

Then with one accord they rose from their seats and came before me and prostrated themselves on the shining pavement of the throne-room and began to chant in a low, soft tone the Song of Homage with which of old the new-crowned Incas had been hailed generation after generation, Sons of the Sun and lords of life and death throughout the Land of the Four Regions.

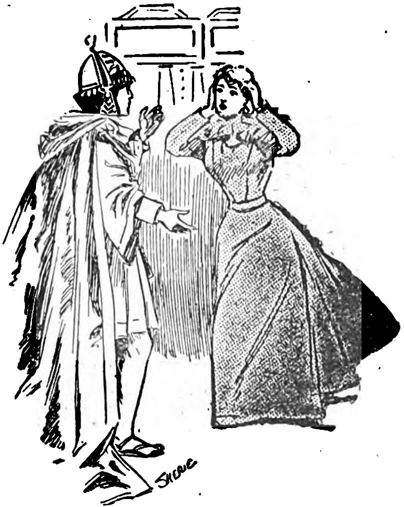
And now a wondrous thing happened. As I stood there facing the prostrate throng, lowering the Llautu on to my head, I heard a low sharp cry beside me on my right hand. I turned half round and there I saw Golden Star staring at me with eyes burning with the light that shone through them from her new-awakened soul.

Her hands were clasped to her temples, pushing back her thick bright hair from her forehead. Her face was flushed and her half open lips were working as though they were striving to shape some long-forgotten words. At the instant that the Llautu touched my brows she rose to her feet.

A cry burst from her lips and went ringing down the hall, and the next moment she had thrown herself forward and I had caught her in my arms. As I did so our eyes met and our hearts looked at each other through them. In that one burning glance the mists of the long years were melted; all things else were forgotten, and for the moment we stood alone—the children of a long-dead generation—in the solitude that our strange fate had made about us. Then her lips moved, not dumbly this time, and in a voice that woke who shall say how many memories in my heart she said:

“Have they awakened us, my lord? Tell me how long we have slept, my Vilcaroya. It seems long to me, and I have had strange dim dreams, and thought I was not one, but two, and that one of my selves was your sister and the other was your coya and queen. It was strange, was it not, to dream like that?”

“Not so strange but that it may be true, O my Sister, Golden Star,” I said, my wonder for the moment overcome by a new hope that uprose within me at her words. “Stranger things than that have happened since we fell asleep together in the distant days that are no more. See, Ñusta mi, here is your other self, the living shape of that sister-soul of yours, who has watched over you and cared for you and loved you since you drew the first breath of your new life. She cannot speak our tongue, for she is the daughter of another age than ours, but she has taught me hers and I will speak for you.”



A cry burst from her lips.

As I said this I took her hands from where they rested on my shoulders and led her to the seat of Joyful Star, who was standing in front of it with one hand on the arm of her chair and the other one clasped to her heart, her face white with fear and her eyes wide with wonder.

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[*] The Queen-Consort of the Inca, as distinguished from the many hers whom the ancient laws allowed him to marry.

"What has happened, Vilcaroya?" she said, in a voice so low that it was almost a whisper. "Has her memory come back, and does she believe herself to be your—your wife?"

As she forced the last word from her hesitating lips I saw the hot blood flow into her cheeks, and a new light that shot like a dart of fire into my heart leapt into her eyes.

"No," I said, with a smile that was quickly answered by one that came unawares to her lips. "She calls herself my sister, and me her lord, and says that she has dreamed that she is not one but two, and that her other sister-self is Vilcaroya's wife and queen. Now if that dream may be the truth, tell her so."

And with that I took her hand gently from where it rested on the chair and laid Golden Star's in it.

"But—I cannot speak your language and she wouldn't understand me," she said softly, with one swift glance at me and another longer look at Golden Star's smiling face, so wondrous like her own.

"There is another speech than that of the tongue," I said, "which all men understand."

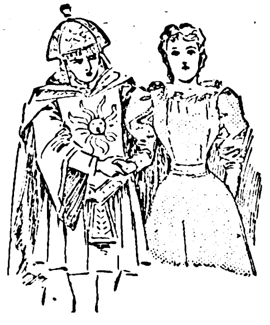
"Yes," she said, and then she drew Golden Star gently to her and kissed her.

CHAPTER XXII.

Seen by the Starlight.

All this while the Ayllos had remained silent and prostrate before the throne, none daring to raise their heads till I bade them, and the three Englishmen sat still, hearing what I had said to Joyful Star and her answer to it, and yet neither speaking nor rising from their seats, each full of his own thoughts and not caring to betray his feelings by any rash word that he might speak in the wonder of the moment. But now I turned with my heart full of gladness and new hope, and said in a voice in which my gladness seemed to sing like a bird in the morning sky:

"Rise up, Brothers of the Blood, and look upon your lord and rejoice with him, for our Father the Sun has looked kindly upon him and filled all his life with light. He has given back memory and speech to Golden Star, his daughter, and put it in to the heart of Joyful Star, her other sister-self, to love her and to make plain that which might else have been dark."



I led Golden Star back to her chair.

Then they all rose to their feet and saluted me and paid their homage to Golden Star and Joyful Star as well, and then I waved them to their seats, and when they had gone I led Golden Star back to her chair, and then I called Djama to me, and when he came and stood before me I said:

"You have seen what has happened and you have heard the words that have been said. You see now that there is no need for Golden Star to go to England. Therefore it remains but for you and for your friends to take the treasure that is yours and for us to say farewell."

"And Ruth?" he asked. "You know, of course, that that will mean farewell to her also."

I could see that he was ill at ease, and that his words were not the words that his true thoughts would have spoken. As I looked at him I saw that his eyes shifted and wandered from my gaze, and I said coldly:

"Much has happened since we last spoke of this. It will be for Joyful Star herself to say whether she will bid me farewell or not. Is she not free to go or stay as she pleases? Say now when I shall command the treasure to be taken out of the Hall of Gold for you and where you wish it to be placed."

"I must ask you to give me time to think about that and talk it over with the Professor," he said, "for we have no means of taking such an immense amount of gold to the coast and getting it on board ship without suspicion."

"Go then," I said, "and speak with him, but remember that it must be done quickly, for ere many days are passed there will be war in the land, and neither your lives nor your gold will be safe."

"I will take good care of that," he said in a tone whose strangeness told me more than his words, and with that he turned away and sat down beside the Professor with the thoughts that were within his heart still unspoken. As soon as he had gone back to his seat I called Francis Hartness to me and set him beside me on the right hand of the throne, and then I told who he was and showed that he was well skilled in those new arts of warfare which had taken the place of our ancient methods, and how he had promised to use his knowledge for me and lead my armies into battle, hazarding his own life on the chance of our success; and when I had said this I named him leader of all those who should range themselves under the Rainbow Banner when the day of battle came, and bade all present obey his orders and enforce obedience to them even as though his commands were my own.

Then I bade Francis Hartness himself speak all that was in his mind freely and without fear of betrayal concerning the war that was soon to be waged between the rival factions of our oppressors and the means that were to be used to turn their strife to our own account, and this he did, speaking in fluent Spanish and in short clear sentences, as a man of action and a soldier should speak.

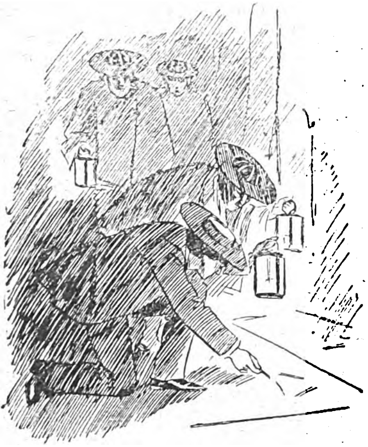
He told how he had made himself acquainted with the forces on both sides, and how, with the help of Tupac, he had sounded the feelings of those by whom the fighting would have to be done and had found them willing to leave the service of the schemers who sought to make themselves tyrants over the land and fight for those whose purpose it was to restore the ancient rule and give liberty to all their lives as they thought best and to win for themselves as many of the gifts of the All-Father as they were able to do. He told, too, how he had sent many messages over the lightning wires to his own country, bidding friends like himself in war to come out as quickly as might be to find the fortune that awaited them, yet saying nothing of war but only of gold that was to be had for the taking.

When he had finished I bade Tupac summon all who were present to the foot of the throne, and then I spoke to them of the plans that I had made with Francis Hartness in all their details, and showed them how each, according to his opportunities, could give his help in carrying them out, and then, as by this time the night was far spent and there was yet work of another sort to do, I sent them back to their seats, and, calling Ruth and Golden Star to me, I bade them follow me, and led the way down the hall and through one of the passages at the end until I brought them to a chamber which Tupac and his comrades had already prepared for them by my orders, and here I left them to take their rest together, promising to return in the morning.

When I got back into the throne-room Djama asked me whither I had taken his sister, and I told him what I had done, saying that the hour was now too late for us to return to our home on the other side of the valley, and that, moreover, it was needful for us to go back to the Hall of Gold to make a proper count of the treasure and to let him and the Professor swear their oaths of secrecy in the presence of the fathers of my people.

Then I left him, looking much more ill at ease than such tidings should have made him feel, and told Tupac in the ancient tongue to take three of his companions and go and do that which it was now time to do. So he went and chose his men and departed through the bronze doors by which we had entered the hall. After that I named a guard to remain all night in the hall and bade the rest go and put on their everyday clothing, and I, too, went back into the chamber behind the throne and changed my imperial garments for the others that I had put off.

Then I ordered the torches and candles to be extinguished, all saving a few that were left for the guards, and then the eyes of Djama and the Professor were bandaged afresh, though those of Francis Hartness, he being now one of us and devoted to our cause, were left open; and when this was done the lanterns were lit and I led the way into the antechamber of the throne-room where the bronze doors still stood open as Tupac had left them.



I sought about with my lantern on the floor.

I stood by them till the last man had passed out, then I went through and closed them. Then I followed the rest and again placed myself at their head. But when we reached the end of the straight passage, instead of turning the revolving pillar which closed the entrance of the winding passage leading to the Hall of Gold, I sought about with my lantern on the floor until I found three marks in the shape of a triangle in one corner of a great square slab of stone, and, taking a long staff which one of the men carried, I placed the end on the triangle and, calling two others to help me, we bore downwards with all our weight, and when we had thrust awhile on the staff the corner of the slab sank into the floor and it turned on a diagonal axis until it stood upright, leaving a three-cornered space large enough for a man's body to pass through easily. Then I made a sign to one of the Ayllos and said:

"Anahuac, take your lantern down there and light the way down the steps."

"Truly there are no secrets in the land hidden from the eyes of our lord!" he said, glancing round in wonder at the rest, and then he lowered himself with his lantern into the hole and disappeared.

Then I bade the rest follow him one by one, and so all went down, I going last with Francis Hartness, who helped me to put the stone back into its place.

Our way now led along a rough-hewn gallery that sloped gently upwards for some twelve hundred paces, and at the end of it there was a little chamber measuring some twenty feet each way and having no apparent outlet, but in the middle of one of the walls there was another of the cunningly constructed revolving stones which our ancient masons ever used to bar their secret ways, and this three of our men, working as I told them, turned on its hinge, and through the opening that was thus made we passed out in single file to a little rock-walled valley over which the stars were shining.

The door was closed behind us, and dust and dirt was rubbed over the thin lines which marked where it fitted into the rock, and then we extinguished our lanterns and passed out of the valley on to the pampa.

The place where we had come out was about a thousand paces from the walls of the Sacsahuaman. We halted on the plain and I gave my last orders to the Ayllos. Then we set out in the direction of the fortress, and as we went, one by one my followers disappeared silently into the half darkness about us till at last only four of them were left, two leading Djama and two the Professor.

I had been talking of many things with Francis Hartness on the way, and showing him how in the olden times we had made use of the secret passages such as those he has already seen, and when he saw that we had come out by a way different to that which we had entered he asked me the reason of it, and I answered him in a low voice and said:

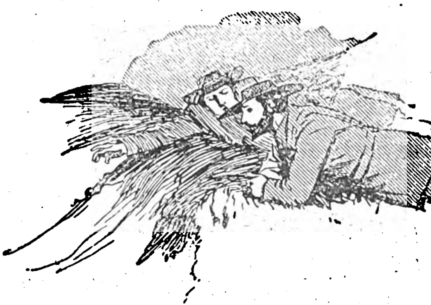
"Because the other way is closed. Have patience a little while and you shall see why."

Then we went on our way in silence until we came to the edge of the valley in which the Sayacusca stands. Here I halted and whispered a few words to the men who were leading Djama and the Professor. They slipped off their ponchos and threw them over the heads of their prisoners, for such the two were now to be for the present. I heard a muffled cry from Djama, and I went to him and put my hand on his shoulder and said in a whisper:

"Keep quiet and lie down. These men have knives and will use them at my bidding."

Then they pulled him and the Professor down, and they lay quiet, knowing that their lives were in my hands. Then I lay down on the edge of the valley, signing to Francis Hartness to come and lie beside me. Then I pointed into the valley and bade him watch. Presently in the dim light we made out figures moving about the rock and caught every now and then the glint of the star rays along thin lines of polished metal:

"Rifle barrels!" he whispered. "What are they doing here? I didn't know that your men had any weapons yet."



Then I pointed to the valley and bade him watch.

"No," I said, "those are in the hands of soldiers from Cuzco. The time has come sooner than I thought for, and yet not too soon. You will see the first blow struck for the freedom of my people before to-morrow's sun rises."

(*To be continued.*)

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TREASURES ✱
OF THE WHITE GOD.

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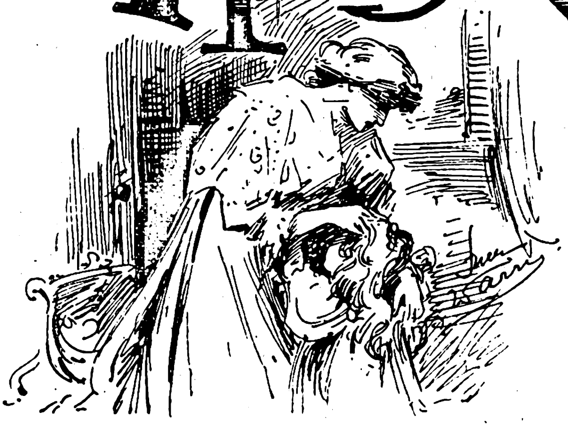
THE TREASURES OF THE WHITE GOD

A FAMILY TRAGEDY



“I TELL you it is the scandal of Paris. For the last fortnight the name of your wife has been coupled with that of Abinadab Gotch, the Jew money-lender of Versailles.”

He who spoke these words was a subject of the Tsar, young, of good looks, and honest countenance, in the employ of the Russian Embassy at the French capital. His words were directed to young Philip Carson, junior partner in the firm of Doré, Boissais, et Cie., of Paris, Lyons, and Marseilles.

The hour was eleven of the forenoon, and the two men were leisurely ensconced before a blazing fire in the card-room of their club, the name of which, so far as the present chronicler is concerned, shall remain undisclosed.

It was a fête day, and the great offices and shops were all closed. From outside came the sounds of tumult and the loud guffaws of a boisterous crowd surrounding a couple of half-drunken, mud-bespattered orators, who were haranguing the mob, and also each other, from one and the same statue in the square.

For a moment Carson did not reply, then springing up he took hold of the young diplomat and dragged him from the couch before he realised what was taking place, and flung him on the hearthstone.

“You lying scoundrel,” he exclaimed fiercely. Then he strode out of the room, unwittingly leaving his indiscreet acquaintance on the floor, his left temple having come into violent contact with the sharp corner of the mantelpiece.

Philip Carson was a young Englishman who had at one time acted as the London representative of the firm of Doré, Boissais, et Cie. Through unceasing energy during a period of some five years, he had been the means of bringing so much additional business to the house, that his employers had offered him a partnership in their firm, a post which he gladly accepted.

Some six years before the enactment of the incidents above recorded, he had married Marie Violetta, the only daughter of Baron Alphonse Garnaud, a young, fair-headed and exquisitely beautiful French girl, who ever since their union had been a most devoted and loving helpmate.

They were an ideal couple, so their neighbours said, and certainly, judging from outward appearances, none could have been more happy. The young wife had borne her husband one child, a flaxen-haired little body whom they had christened Blanche Marguerite, but whom they used to call their white flower.

On quitting the club premises, Carson went straight to his home. His wife was away, having gone on a visit to some friends in another quarter of Paris, and was not to return until the following day. He himself had been to Lyons on a matter of business, and had come back unexpectedly just twenty-four hours before his time.

On reaching his flat in the Rue de Fayette, he shut himself in his study, and threw himself on the sofa in a frenzy. For a time he was mad. Beads of perspiration burst forth across his forehead. He could neither reason nor reflect, and the *déjeuner* was left untouched.

Of a jealous nature, could he have got hold of Abinadab Gotch it would surely have gone ill with the usurer, guilty or not. At length, obtaining control of himself, he unlocked the study door and proceeded to his wife’s room.

For an instant the man hesitated. He had never pried into his wife’s private recesses before. But the undiplomatic Russian diplomat was not the only one who had helped rumour in its flight. The ghoul whose breath is slander had seized the oppontunity and stalked abroad.

Carson had received two anonymous letters in the past week, advising him of a possible understanding between his wife and the Hebraic Shylock, and one up-to-date journal devoted to the collection and circulation of scandal had more than hinted at it.

But the thing was preposterous, he argued to himself. How could his beautiful Violetta, happy, and with nothing to wish for, find any attraction in a villainous *roué* of some three score years and ten of the stamp of Abinadab Gotch? he asked himself for the five hundredth time. Besides, he himself had been in the company of the Jew somewhat considerably of late and had noticed nothing. No; the idea was absurd. He would not believe it of his Violetta. It was too cruel.

While he stood in front of the wardrobe there passed through his mind these things. All at once his eye became fixed on a small scrap of paper which was partly sticking out from beneath the fender. As if impelled by some irresistible power, Carson rushed to the fire-place, seized the scrap, and straightened it out with both hands. A look of intense terror spread over his handsome face, his lips whitened, and he reeled backwards to the bed. Then he seemed to recover himself and glanced at the slip once more. The words he read were these:

“. . . necessary if you would save yourself to be at Versailles to-morrow. Meet me at the station at 11.30. You must go through with this business as I have helped you—it’s a matter of hard cash for both.—Yours, ma chère, Abinadab.”

Carson's eyes were riveted to the fatal scrap. He clutched nervously at the old wooden bedpost, a wild look in his grey eyes. Presently there was a gentle tap at the door, and from a tiny voice there came the request:

"What is the matter with papa?"

Carson did not answer, and the child entered.

At length Carson's senses returned to him, and he took the baby in his arms, pressed her to his breast, and sobbed.

"Where is mamma?" asked the wee one, laughing unconcernedly, while the father wept again, as many have done before and since at the thought of a wife's dishonour.

Carson put down the little mite gently on to the bed and fled. The babe was tired, and she slept and dreamt of pleasant things. The father took down his hat from the peg in the hall, went out of his home, and took train to Versailles in the pursuit of an apparently guilty wife.

It was twelve o'clock. At half past eleven his wife had an appointment—it was clear enough in writing—with a blackguard of a Jew money-lender, who in his time had wrung the life-blood from a thousand dupes, and filled the Morgue time and again.

As Carson wandered listlessly from one street in Versailles to another, a carriage drawn by a pair of greys hove in sight; and, thinking he recognised one of the occupants, he withdrew up a narrow court-way. The vehicle drew up across the way.

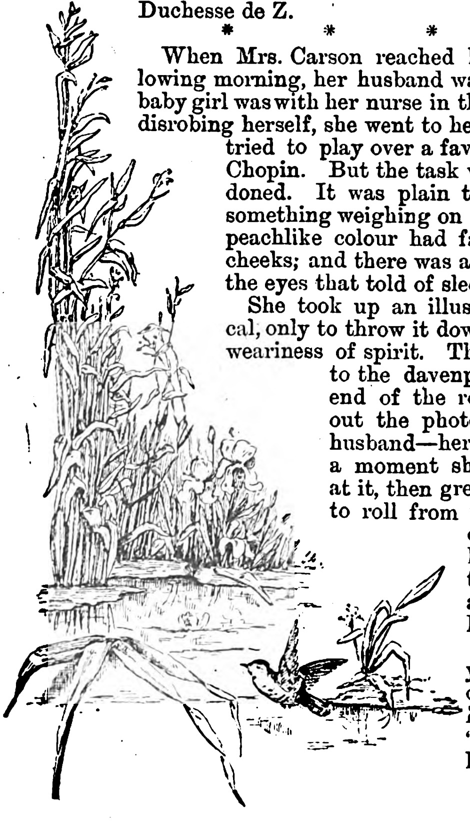
Alas, the little scap of paper, which had only come into his hands through the untidiness of a maid, was no false prophet. It had proved only too true, and he would have to apologise to the Russian for the insult and the injury. The carriage contained the wife of Philip Carson, Abinadab Gotch, and the notorious Duchesse de Z.

* * * *

When Mrs. Carson reached home the following morning, her husband was out, and the baby girl was with her nurse in the park. After disrobing herself, she went to her boudoir and tried to play over a favourite tune by Chopin. But the task was soon abandoned. It was plain that there was something weighing on her mind. The peachlike colour had faded from her cheeks; and there was a heavy look in the eyes that told of sleepless nights.

She took up an illustrated periodical, only to throw it down out of sheer weariness of spirit. Then she walked to the davenport in the far end of the room, and took out the photograph of her husband—her Philip. For a moment she gazed sadly at it, then great tears began to roll from the large blue eyes, and she kissed the portrait passionately between her sobs.

"Philip," the young wife cried aloud in her grief, "if he only knew."



There was no echo there; no comforter.

Presently the hall door banged, and there was a commotion downstairs. Half a minute passed, and her husband was carried in by a *concierge* and *gendarme*, his face haggard and his eyes bloodshot. The men placed their burden on the sofa and withdrew, the police officer merely remarking:

"Shot through the lungs, madame. A case of death."

Carson had fought the Russian diplomat, and fallen at the second shot.

In an instant the wife was at her husband's side.

"What is the matter, my Philip?" she cried madly.

But the man only motioned her away. With a supreme effort he raised himself to a sitting posture, and hoarsely asked:

"Where were you yesterday, Violetta?"

"At the de Bensaude's, of course. Why do you ask? But let me send for a physician."

"Were you nowhere else?" inquired Carson, who was evidently in great pain.

There was a pause. It was a terrible conflict between truth on the one side and deceit on the other; but, for once, the former conquered.

"Yes," answered Violetta at length; "but I decline to say where."

"I saw you at Versailles. So I am second to Abinadab Gotch." He smiled grimly, and added: "It is over between us, Violetta."

Mrs. Carson was dumfounded. For a short space she stood rooted to the floor, then, regaining control of herself, she confessed:

"Yes, I was at Versailles. But I have not dishonoured your name. I swear it, Philip."

"It is a lie," shouted the man brutally. "You have wrecked the life of one you swore to honour and obey. Don't you know that your connection with the Hebrew Gotch is the common talk of the town, and I have been fool enough to turn a deaf ear to it?"

"On my honour I am innocent, Philip. I have saved your name."

"Why, I myself saw you enter a club-house, notorious for card-sharping, with a man who has just been blackballed from a low turf club."

This seemed to sting the woman to the quick. She drew back as if struck, and, vouchsafing no reply, rang the bell and retired to her bedroom. In a moment a woman's heart was turned to steel against her will. Carson was carried to his room, and a surgeon was soon in attendance.

Meanwhile the young wife in her own apartment, her eyes dimmed with tears, had formed her own resolve. While hastily dressing herself, she was interrupted by the entrance of her maid bringing in the coffee. With her came the little Blanche.

"Mamma, daddie loves you," said the small one, sweetly unconscious. "Look, mamma, my dollie's broke!"

"Hush! little angel," said the mother, emptying with faltering hand the contents of a package into the coffee.

But the little prattler paid no heed.

"He loves you," continued the baby voice; "he told me so. What is the matter with daddie, mamma?"

The weeping mother let the question go unanswered, but kissed her child.

"Mother is going out, love," she said, gently stroking the golden hair the while. "Baby must take this to papa. Tell papa mother loves him always."

And the parent handed the cup to her little one, kissed her on the forehead, and went out of the house. Reflection cast upon the honour of a pure woman is in her eyes second only to the guilt itself.

Twenty minutes later Philip Carson breathed his last, death, according to the physician, arising through loss of blood occasioned by a shot wound.

The following day the body of Marie Violetta Carson was found by a lighterman in the waters of the Seine. It was a case of suicide.

* * * * * * *

Only three persons ever knew the particulars relating to the wreck of Philip Carson's home. One of these was Abinadab Adler, alias Gotch, now dead; the second was Jeanne Miannay, also dead, a cousin of Mrs. Carson, who, whilst a hospital nurse in Calcutta, had received a letter from her relative, presumably written only a few moments before she put her rash resolve into execution.

The third person is the present chronicler, who, by virtue of an acquaintance with all the parties, was taken into the confidence of Jeanne Miannay, on her deathbed in a fever ward in an East African military hospital. Shortly, here are the sad facts:

Entirely unknown to his wife, Carson, in an unfortunate moment, had formed the acquaintance of Abinadab Gotch, or Adler, who was, though not ostensibly, the proprietor of numerous gambling establishments throughout the gay capital.

Although in receipt of a steady income from his business, Carson was wishful to get richer more rapidly than legitimate trading allowed, with the very natural result that he soon became heavily in debt, and the time came when, in the event of further losses ensuing, he would have to sell up his home, quit Paris, which had made him both wealthy and a pauper, and face ruin.

Just when the outlook was at its blackest, Violetta learnt the terrible position of her husband from an outside source. It was at this juncture that she determined to help him, though such was her nature she dared not confess what she knew.

Now in Paris there are to this day clubs where ladies of gentle birth, the mothers of little children, congregate to win or lose money in games of chance. With the exception of the staff, no males are admitted.

Men of the most abandoned description manage these places; yet, notwithstanding the general vileness of the surroundings, the thirst for gambling is so abnormal amongst some women that they do not stand on the least ceremony.

With the object of winning money, and thereby saving her husband from disgrace, the young wife and mother became a frequenter of one of these plague-spots. It happened that Abinadab Adler, alias Gotch, was the owner of the club selected, and Abinadab, true to his nature, forthwith made love to Mrs. Carson, well knowing that she was the consort of the man he had brought to the verge of ruin.

Violetta did not repulse him, nor did she encourage him; he was permitted to make love at a distance. He had robbed her husband, argued the wife; why should he not be robbed in his turn? Besides, so far, she had lost heavily at the tables.

The result was, the Jew grew more and more infatuated, and began to make presents of money to the object of his affections. Then, after weeks of fearful degradation and insult, after weeks of toil in an atmosphere that was loathsome to her, fortune smiled on Violetta, and she went home one day a sad and a rich woman.

It was then that her husband, for the love of whom she had laboured and suffered so much, brought her faith into question, with the result we know.

Love limits discretion, but Violetta, pure in mind and body, went to her death the saviour of the family name. The debts were paid.

Philip Carson drank the poisoned coffee handed to him by his own child.

Blanche Marguerite—Sister Blanche—is now dead to the world. She has made her home in a convent in South Australia, and spends her time in prayer.

B. S. K.

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THE * KISS.

It was still quite light out of doors, but inside, with the curtains drawn, and the smouldering fire sending out a dim, uncertain glow, the room was full of deep shadows.

Brantain sat in one of these shadows; it had overtaken him, and he did not mind. The obscurity lent him courage to keep his eyes fastened as ardently as he liked upon the girl who sat in the firelight.

She was very handsome, with a certain fine, rich colouring that belongs to the healthy. She was quite composed as she idly stroked the satiny coat of the cat that lay curled in her lap, and she occasionally sent a slow glance into the shadow where her companion sat. They were talking low, of indifferent things which plainly were not the things that occupied their thoughts.

She knew that he loved her—a frank, blustering fellow, without guile enough to conceal his feelings, and no desire to do so. For two weeks past he had sought her society eagerly and persistently. She was confidently waiting for him to declare himself, and she meant to accept him. The rather insignificant and unattractive Brantain was enormously rich; and she liked and required the entourage which wealth could give her.

During one of the pauses between their talks of the last tea and the next reception, the door opened, and a young man entered whom Brantain knew quite well. The girl turned her face towards him. A stride or two brought him to her side, and bending over her chair—before she could suspect his intention, for she did not realise that he had not seen her visitor—he pressed an ardent, lingering kiss upon her lips.

Brantain slowly rose; so did the girl rise, but quickly; and the newcomer stood between them, a little amusement and some defiance struggling with the confusion in his face.

"I believe," stammered Brantain, "I see that I have stayed too long. I—I had no idea—that is, I must wish you good-bye." He was clutching his hat with both hands, and probably did not perceive that she was extending her hand to him. Her presence of mind had not completely deserted her; but she could not have trusted herself to speak. However, Brantain had by this time reached the door, and before she could attract his attention he had disappeared.

"Hang me if I saw him sitting there, Nattie!" explained the visitor, as the door closed. "I'm awfully sorry. I know it's awkward for you. But I hope you'll forgive me this once. Why, what's the matter?"

"Don't touch me, don't come near me," she returned angrily. "What do you mean by entering the house without ringing?"

"I came in with your brother, as I often do," he answered coldly, in self-justification. "We entered the other way. He went upstairs, and I came in here hoping to find you. The explanation is simple enough, and ought to satisfy you that the misadventure was unavoidable. But do say that you forgive me, Nathalie," he intreated, softening.

"Forgive you! You don't know what you are talking about. Let me pass. It depends upon—a good deal whether I ever forgive you."

At that next reception which she and Brantain had been talking about, she approached the young man with a delicious frankness of manner when she saw him there.

"Will you let me speak to you a moment or two, Mr. Brantain?" she asked, with an engaging but perturbed smile. He seemed extremely unhappy; but when she took his arm and walked away with him, seeking a retired corner, a ray of hope mingled with the almost comical misery of his expression. She was apparently very outspoken.

"Perhaps I should not have sought this interview, Mr. Brantain, but—but, oh, I have been very uncomfortable, almost miserable, since that little encounter the other afternoon. When I thought how you might have misinterpreted it, and believed things"—hope was plainly gaining the ascendancy over misery in Brantain's round, guileless face—"of course, I know it is nothing to you, but for my own sake I want you to understand that Mr. Harvey is an intimate friend of long standing.

"Why, we have always been like cousins—like brother and sister, I may say. He is my brother's most intimate friend, and often fancies that he is entitled to the same privileges as the family. I know it is absurd, uncalled for, to tell you this; undignified, even," she was almost weeping, "but it makes so much difference to me what you think of—of me." Her voice had grown very low and agitated. The misery had all disappeared from Brantain's face.

"Then you do really care what I think, Miss Nathalie? May I call you Miss Nathalie?" They turned into a long, dim corridor, that was lined on either side with tall, graceful plants. They walked slowly to the very end of it. When they turned to retrace their steps, Brantain's face was radiant and hers triumphant.

* * * * *

Harvey was among the guests at the wedding; and he sought her out in a rare moment when she stood alone.

"Your husband," he said, smiling, "has sent me over to kiss you."

A quick blush suffused her face and round polished throat. "I suppose it's natural for a man to feel and act generously on an occasion of this kind. He tells me he doesn't want his marriage to interrupt wholly that pleasant intimacy which has existed between you and me. I don't know what you've been telling him," with an insolent smile, "but he has sent me to kiss you."

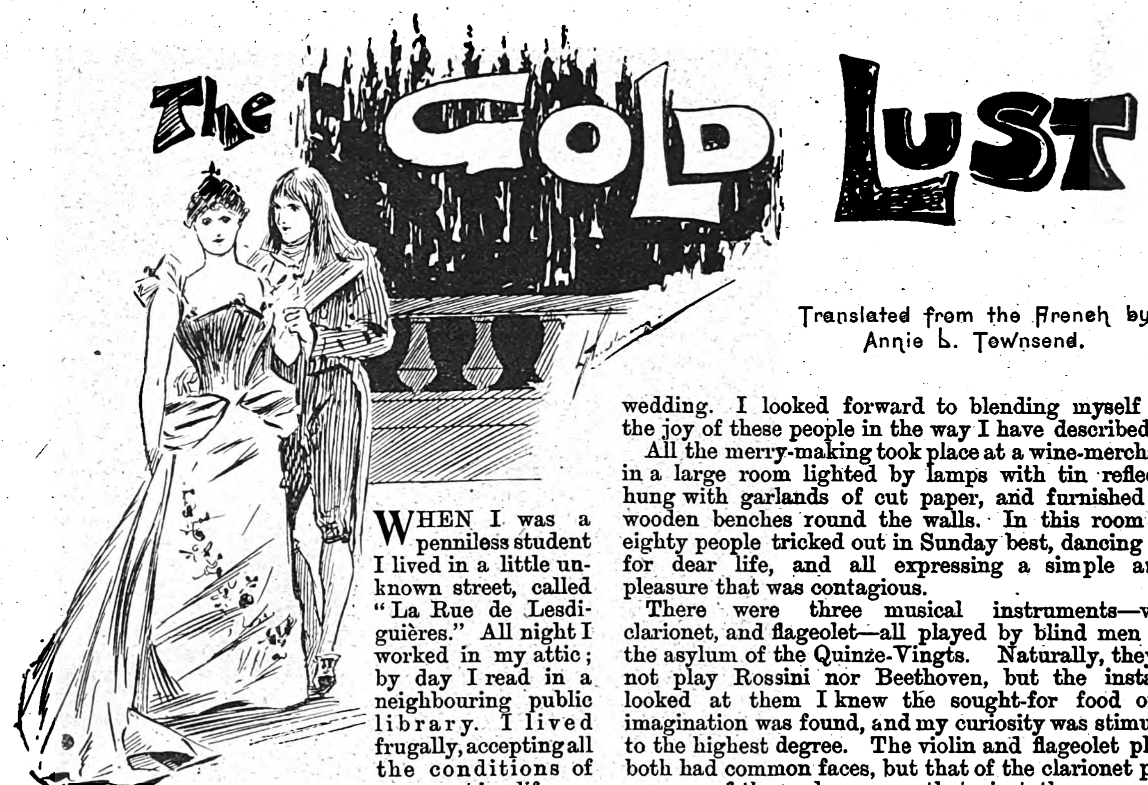
She felt like a chess player who, by a clever handling of the pieces, sees the game taking the course intended. Her eyes were bright and tender with a smile as they glanced up into his; and her lips looked hungry for the kiss which they invited.

"But, you know," he went on quietly, "I didn't tell him so; it would have seemed ungrateful; but I can tell you. I've stopped kissing women: it's dangerous."

Well, she had Brantain and his million left. A person can't have everything in this world; and it was a little unreasonable of her to expect it.

E. C. Waggener.

The Gold Lust



Translated from the French by
Annie L. Townsend.

When I was a penniless student I lived in a little unknown street, called "La Rue de Lesdiguières." All night I worked in my attic; by day I read in a neighbouring public library. I lived frugally, accepting all the conditions of monastic life, so essential to brain-workers. One single passion drew me from my studious habits, but even that was a study. I used to go about watching the manners of the *faubourg*, its people, and their characteristics. As ill-clad as the workmen themselves, and as careless of decorum, they were never on their guard against me, so I could mingle in the crowds, watch their bargains, hear their disputes as they came back from work.

With me the power of observation was already intuitive, penetrating the soul without neglecting the body, seizing upon outward forms so thoroughly, that it instantly went beyond them, till I had the power of living the very life of the individual I was gauging.

As I listened I seemed wedded to their life. I felt their rags upon my back, I walked with my feet in their tattered shoes; their desires, their wants, all passed into my soul, and my soul passed into theirs. It was the dream of a waking man. To quit my own belongings, to become another than myself by excitement of the moral faculties, and to do this whensoever I willed it—such was my sole distraction. To what do I owe this gift? Is it second sight? Would the abuse of it lead to madness? I have never fathomed the cause of the power. I have it; I use it—that is all.

One day my charwoman came to invite me to be present at her sister's wedding. To give an idea of what the wedding was likely to be, I must explain that I gave this poor woman forty sous a month for making my bed every morning, cleaning my shoes, sweeping my room, and preparing my breakfast. Beyond this she earned ten sous a day at some wretched calling; her husband earned four francs; they had three children, and yet they contrived to be honest. That sort of person interests me. I readily promised to go to the wedding. I looked forward to blending myself with the joy of these people in the way I have described.

All the merry-making took place at a wine-merchant's, in a large room lighted by lamps with tin reflectors, hung with garlands of cut paper, and furnished with wooden benches round the walls. In this room were eighty people tricked out in Sunday best, dancing away for dear life, and all expressing a simple animal pleasure that was contagious.

There were three musical instruments—violin, clarionet, and flageolet—all played by blind men from the asylum of the Quinze-Vingts. Naturally, they did not play Rossini nor Beethoven, but the instant I looked at them I knew the sought-for food of my imagination was found, and my curiosity was stimulated to the highest degree. The violin and flageolet players both had common faces, but that of the clarionet player was one of those phenomena that rivet the eyes of the artist and the philosopher.

Imagine a plaster cast of Danté's face, lighted up with the red glare of an argand lamp and crowned with a forest of silver-white hair. The bitter and melancholy expression of this magnificent head was only ennobled by blindness, for thought reanimated the dead eyes, and fiery gleams seemed to dart from them.

The old man paid very little attention to his playing, but, on the other hand, the dancers cared very little what was played. I felt that the old Homer cherished within himself an Odyssey condemned to oblivion. All the violent passions that govern a man, for good or evil, were present in his nobly chiselled, lividly Italian face.

His grey eyebrows jutted over cavernous eye-sockets, that I dreaded to see lighted with the fire of thought as one dreads to see the torches and the weapons of brigands gleam at the mouth of a cave. There was a lion caged in that body, a lion whose rage was spent with useless beating against the bars. The fire of despair was dead in its ashes, the lava had grown cold, but the furrows, the desolation, a little smoke, told of the violence of the eruption and the ravages of the flames. The thoughts that had moulded the man's appearance were as hot in his soul as they were cold upon his face. At a pause in the music I questioned him:

"What countryman are you—you playing on the clarionet?"

"I am a Venetian," replied the blind man, with a slight Italian accent.

"Were you born blind, or how did you become so?"

"By accident," he replied eagerly.

"Venice is a beautiful city; I always had a fancy to go there," I continued.

"If I went with you, you would go to some purpose," he replied. His face grew animated, his wrinkles worked, he was much moved.

"Go on with your playing, Doge," said the flageolet. Hope played over his worn face like a blue flame. With a blind man's sixth sense, he felt the interest I took in him.

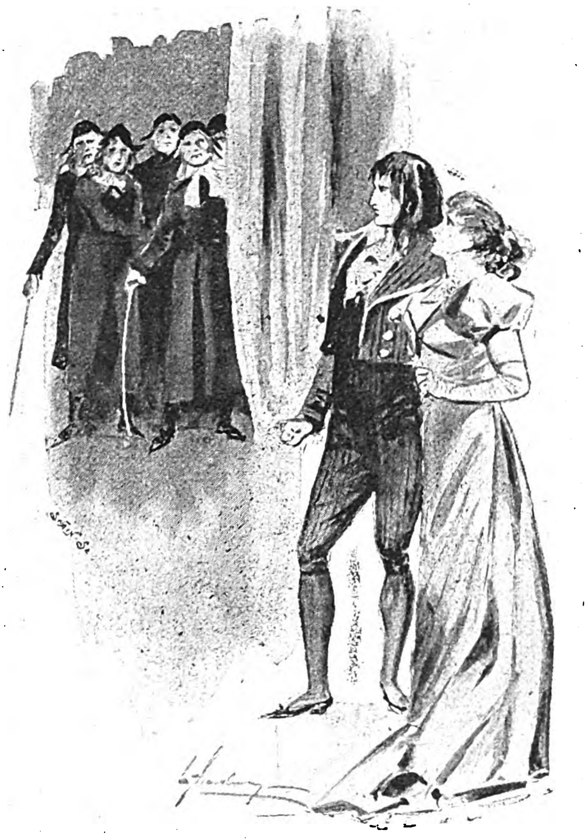
"Why do they call you Doge?" I asked.

"Their joke. I am a Venetian patrician, and might have been a doge like another."

"What is your name?"

"They write it Canet here," he replied, "but in Italian it is Marco Facino Cane, Prince of Varese."

"A descendant of the famous condottiere whose conquests went to the Duke of Milan?"



"They set spies on us, and surprised us in each other's arms."

"The same," he replied. "In those days Cane's son fled to Venice and was registered on the Golden Book. To-day there is neither book nor Cane." He finished with a violent, rebellious gesture.

"If you were a Venetian senator, you must have been rich. How did you lose your fortune?"

At this question of mine he raised his head as if he were really looking at me—a most tragic action—and answered:

"Through misfortunes."

I stood lost in a dream of Venice and the Adriatic. Facino Cane stopped playing, stood up, and took my arm.

"Let us leave this place!" he said abruptly, and we passed out into the street. Then he spoke again: "Will you guide me to Venice? Will you trust to me? You shall be richer than the ten richest houses of Amsterdam or London; richer than a fairy tale."

He led me on to a solitary quarter, and at last sat down upon a block of stone where the moon poured its light upon his silver hair. The noise of the tumult of the boulevards came to us faintly. It was a fantastic scene.

"I am twenty years old, and you talk to me of millions. Do you think there is any hardship I would hesitate to undergo to obtain them? Don't amuse yourself at my expense on such a subject," I cried.

"May I die without absolution," he swore violently, "if what I am going to tell you is not true. I have been twenty years old, like you; I was rich, handsome, noble. I began my life with the first of follies—love. My love was like a lava flood. Years ago I fell in love with one of the Vendramini, eighteen years old, married to one of the Sagredos, a rich senator twice her age, and wildly in love with his wife. My lady love and I, still innocent as the angels, were talking of love one day, when we were surprised. I was unarmed. He missed me. I sprang upon him and strangled him with my bare hands, wringing his neck like a fowl's.

"I wished to fly with Bianca, but she would not follow me. So much for women! I fled alone. I was indicted, and my goods sequestrated for my heirs. However, I had managed to carry off my diamonds, five rolled pictures by Titian, and all my gold. I went to Milan, where I was not disturbed—my affair did not interest the state.

"Whether woman's fancies influence the unborn child or not, it is a fact that my mother had a passion for gold, and my mania for it amounts to such an intensity of desire, that in all the vicissitudes of my life I have managed to keep some about me. I must handle gold constantly. When I was young I always carried two or three hundred ducats."

As he spoke, the old man drew two ducats from his pocket, and showed them to me.

"I have a special sense for gold as well," he continued; "though I am blind, I stop instinctively before the jewellers' windows. The passion has been my perdition. I became a gambler so as to stake gold. I was not a swindler, so I was swindled. I ruined myself. When my fortune was gone I was seized with a desire to see Bianca. I returned secretly to Venice, found her, and was happy for six months, hidden and cared for by her. I thought to finish my life so. But a suitor of Bianca had suspicions—they have remarkable intuitions in Italy—set spies on us, and surprised us in each other's arms. I did not kill him, but I wounded him seriously. He called his followers and had the place surrounded. I defended myself, and Bianca helped me.

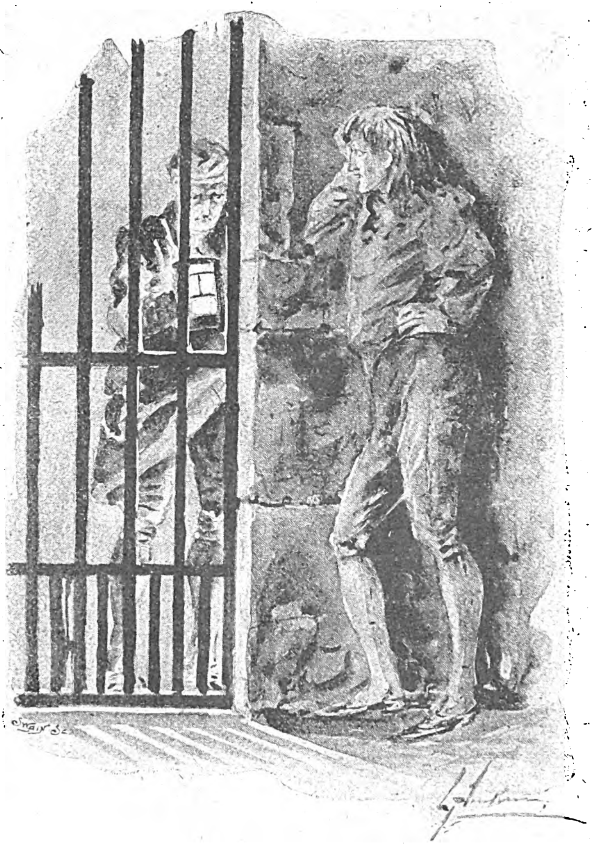
"Formerly, she would not fly with me, but after six months of happiness she wished to die with me, and received several blows. I was overcome, rolled in a cloak and carried in a gondola to a cell containing a deep pit. None of my wounds were mortal. I was condemned to be beheaded, and feigned illness to gain time. I believed myself to be in a cell adjoining the canal; my project was to escape by penetrating the wall and swimming across the canal at the risk of drowning myself.

"Whenever the gaoler brought me food, I read written signs on the wall, like 'Palace Side,' 'Canal Side,' 'Subterranean Side.' With the genius of a caged thing pining for liberty, I succeeded in deciphering with my finger-tips on the surface of a stone an Arab inscription, by which its author informed his successors in the cell that he had taken two stones out of the last course and had dug eleven feet under ground.

"To continue his task it was necessary to heap up on the floor of the cell the earth and mortar produced by the excavation; but even if the warders and superintendents had not been confident in the construction of the building, which only required an exterior watch, the position of the pits, down to which two or three steps led, made the disposal of the earth easy, so that the gaolers need perceive nothing. The immense task had been in vain, at least for him who had begun it, for its non-completion proved the death of the unknown. To profit by his labour, those prisoners who succeeded him must have known Arabic, but I had studied Oriental languages at the Armenian monastery.

"I worked for a month without any visible result, but while I worked, and when fatigue overpowered me, I heard the sound of gold; I saw gold before me; my eyes were dazzled by diamonds. One night the old sword I was working with touched wood. I sharpened the steel and made a hole in the wood. It was the last night but one that I should spend in prison. I made one final effort; I pierced the wood, and my tool reached nothing on the other side. I applied my eyes to the aperture. I had penetrated the wainscot of a vault, where a feeble light showed me a heap of gold.

"The Doge and one of the Council of Ten were in the vault. What they said informed me that I beheld the secret treasury of the Republic. I was saved! When the gaoler came I proposed to him to permit my flight and to escape with me, carrying off all we could. He agreed. A ship was setting sail for the Levant; all our precautions were taken, and Bianca apprised of our plans. She was to join us at Smyrna. That night the hole in my cell was enlarged, and we stood in the secret treasury of Venice.



"Whenever the gaoler brought me food, I read written signs on the wall."

"What a sight! I have seen four tuns filled with gold. In an adjoining room as much silver was heaped up in two banks on each side, leaving a lane down the middle of the apartment between the piles of coin five feet high. I thought the gaoler would lose his senses; he sang, laughed, danced, and pranced among the gold; I threatened to strangle him if he lost time or made a noise. In his joy he did not see a table where the diamonds were. I fell upon it, and filled my sailor's shirt and trousers' pockets; even then I hardly took one-third of what there was.

"Under the table were bars of gold. I persuaded my companion to take only gold; the pearls and diamonds would betray us, I told him. Great as our greed was we could only carry off two thousand pounds of gold, which necessitated six journeys across the prison to the gondola. The sentinel at the water-gate had been bought with a bag of ten pounds of gold. As for the two gondoliers, they thought they were serving the Republic.

"At daybreak we were off. When we were on the high sea and I recalled that night; when I remembered the sensations I had experienced, and saw again in the imagination the immense treasure of which, according to my calculations, I left behind, thirty millions in silver, twenty millions in gold, and uncounted millions in diamonds, pearls, and rubies, my mind reeled; I had the fever of gold. We disembarked at Smyrna and at once started for France.

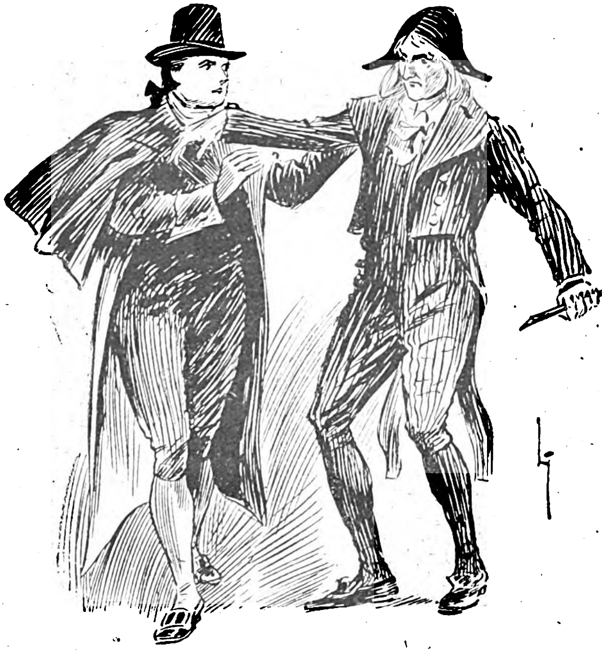
"As we were getting on board the French ship Heaven saw fit to rid me of my accomplice. At the moment I did not reflect upon the full extent of this turn of fate over which I rejoiced so much. We had been so completely enervated that we remained entranced without speaking to each other, waiting till we were in safety to enjoy our treasure. No wonder the head was giddy.

"You will see how God punished me. I was not at rest until I had sold two-thirds of my diamonds in London and Amsterdam, and turned my gold-dust into money. For five years I lived hidden in Madrid; then in 1770 I went to Paris under a Spanish name and lived gorgeously.

"Bianca was dead. In the midst of my splendour I was struck with blindness, the result of my life in the Venetian cell, and of which my preternaturally acute vision for gold might have forewarned me. At that time I was in love with a woman to whom I hoped to join my fate; I had told her the secret of my name; she belonged to a powerful family, and I hoped everything from the favour shown me by Louis XV. I trusted the woman, who was a friend of Madame du Barry. She advised me to consult a famous London oculist; but after a few months' sojourn in that city the woman abandoned me, robbing me of my whole fortune and leaving me without resource in the world, for to tell my name was to deliver myself to the vengeance of Venice.

"I spare you the recital of adventures worthy of Gil Blas. The French Revolution came. I was compelled to enter the Quinze-Vingts Asylum, where the woman who had betrayed me had me placed, after keeping me two years at Bicêtre, for insanity. I never have been able to kill her, blind as I am, and am too poor now to hire an avenger. If I had consulted my gaoler, before I lost him, about the situation of my cell, I should have been able to find the treasury again had I returned to Venice when the republic was destroyed by Napoleon.

"But now I have found you, the man I have wanted all these years. Come with me to Venice. What if I am blind? I shall find that prison door, for I shall see the gold through the walls, I shall feel it under the waves where it is buried; for though the power of Venice was overthrown, the secret of that treasury must have perished with Vendramino, Bianca's brother, a doge by whom I hoped my peace would be made with the Ten.



He staggered towards me.

"I have addressed notes to the First Consul, I have proposed a treaty to the Emperor of Austria; both have dismissed me as a madman. Come, let us be off to Venice. We start beggars, but we shall return millionaires. We shall buy back my estate; you will be my heir; you will be Prince of Varese."

Agitated by the wild tale, tempted by the wild scheme, saddened at the sight of that whitened head, hushed by the view of the black water in the Bastile moats—stagnant as the Venetian canals—I was silent. Facino Cane doubtless thought that I looked upon him, like the rest, with contemptuous pity. He made a gesture which expressed all the philosophy of despair. Perhaps his tale carried him back to his happy days in Venice.

He seized his clarionet, and played a melancholy Venetian song—a barcarolle for which he won back his early talent, the inspiration of a patrician beneath the balcony of his lady-love. It was a sort of "By the Rivers of Babylon," the prayer of a banished man, the regret of a lost great name, mingled with a memory of Bianca. My eyes filled with tears. The gold lust reasserted itself; the ruling passion extinguished the reflected light of this beam of youth.

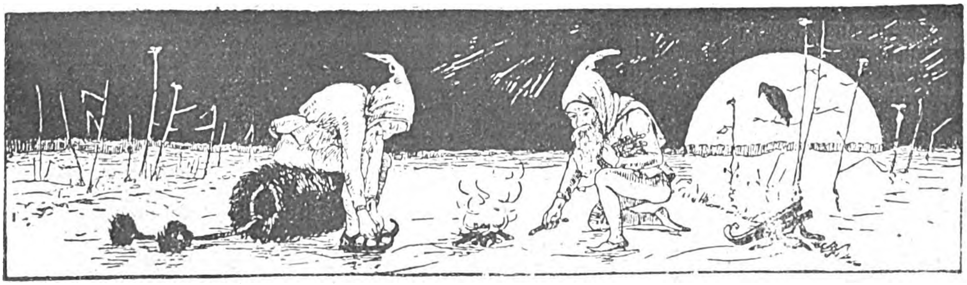
"I am in the treasury," he cried; "asleep or waking, I always see it; I walk there, the diamonds flash. I am not as blind as you think; gold and diamonds light up my night, the night of the last Facino Cane, the last—my title goes to the Memmis. Just Heaven! the murderer's punishment begins in this world. *Ave Maria!*"

He muttered a prayer without removing his eyes from my face. The prayer affected me like a spell pronounced by a wizard.

"We will go to Venice!" I exclaimed. The words seem forced from me by a will other than my own.

The old man rose to his feet. His massive figure wavered in the moonlight. He staggered towards me. His face was on fire. "To-morrow!" he gasped, "we will beg. I am strong, and there is gold ahead—gold——"

He clutched at his throat, beat the air, tottered and fell. I sprang to his assistance. The low night wind wailed, the wedding guests went singing by, and Facino Cane was dead.



LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

3.—Why they didn't Hang Cherokee Hall.

"Now, I don't reckon I ever tells you none about how near we all comes to hangin' Cherokee Hall, do I?"

The old cattleman had a look of interested inquiry as he propounded the above. I gave ready assurance that no such peril of the past to the gentleman named had ever been revealed to me.

"I don't mind onbosomin' myse'f about it," continued my old friend. "It's a misunderstandin', the same bein' Cherokee's fault complete. We don't know him more'n to merely drink with at that epock, an' he's that sly an' furtive in his plays, an' covers his trails so spechul, he nacherally breeds suspicions that when the stage gets to be stood up reg'lar once a week, an' all onaccountable, Cherokee comes mighty close to culminatin' in a rope. Which goes to show that you can't be too open an' free in your game, an' Cherokee would tell you so himse'f.

"This yere tangle I'm thinkin' of ain't more'n a month after Cherokee takes to residin' in Wolfville. He comes trailin' in one evenin' from Tucson an' unfolds a layout an' goes to turnin' faro-bank in the 'Red Light.' No one remarks this partic'lar, which said spectacles is frequent. The general idee is that Cherokee's on the square an' his game is straight, an' of course public interest don't delve no further into his affairs.

"Cherokee himself is one of these yere slim, silent people who ain't talkin' much, an' his eye is one of them sharp greys, like a new bowie.

"It's perhaps the third day when Cherokee begins to struggle into public notice. Thar's a felon whose name's Boone, but who calls himse'f 'The Stingin' Lizard,' been pesterin' around Wolfville mebbe it's a month. This yere Stingin' Lizard is thar when Cherokee comes into camp an' it looks like the Stingin' Lizard takes ag'in Cherokee from the jump.

"Not that this yere Lizard is likely to control public feelin' in the matter; none whatever. He's some onpopular himse'f. He's too toomultuous for one thing, an' he has a habit of shootin' at towerists an' folks he don't know at all, which palls on disinterested people who has dooties to perform.

"About once a week this Lizard man goes an' gets tanked, too, an' then the camp has to set up with him till his visions subsides. Fact is, he's what you all east calls a disturbin' element, an' we makes ready to hang him once or twict; but somethin' comes up an' puts it off, an' we sorter neglects it.

"But, as I say, he takes a notion agin Cherokee. It's the third night after Cherokee gets in, an' he's ca'mly behind his box at the 'Red Light,' when in peramb'lates this yere Lizard. Seems like Cherokee, bein' one of these quiet wolves, fools up the Lizard a lot. He's been hostile an' blood-hungry all day, an' I reckon he all at once recalls Cherokee; an' deemin' of him easy, he allows he'll go an' chew his mane some for relaxation.

"If I was low an' orney like this Lizard, I ain't none shore but I'd be fool'd them days on Cherokee myse'f. He's been peevish an' fretful about his whiskey, Cherokee has, puttin' it up she don't taste right, which not onlikely it don't, but beyond pickin' flaws in his nose-paint, thar ain't much to take hold on about him.

"He's so slim an' quiet besides, thar ain't none of us but figgers this yere Stingin' Lizard's due to stampede him if he tries, which makes what follers all the more impressive.

"So the Lizard comes along into the 'Red Light' whoopin' an' carryin' on by himse'f. Straightway he goes up ag'inst Cherokee's lay-out.

"'I don't buy no chips,' says the Lizard to Cherokee, as he gets opposite. 'I puts money in play, an' when I wins I wants money similar. Thars 50 dols. on the king coppered, an' 50 dols. on the eight open. Turn your kyards, an' turn 'em square. If you don't I'll peel the ha'r an' hide plumb off the top of your head.'

"Cherokee looks at the Lizard sorter soopercilious and indifferent, but he don't say nuthin'. He goes on with the deal, an' the cards comin' that away, he takes in the Lizard's two bets.

"Durin' the next deal the Lizard ain't saying much direct, but keeps cussin' an' wranglin' to himse'f. But he's gettin' his money up all the time, an with 50 dols. he lose on the turn, he's shy mebby 450 dols. at the close.

"'Bein' in the hole about 500 dols.,' says the Lizard in a manner which is a heap onrespectful, 'an' so that a wayfarin' man may not be misled to rooin', I now rises to ask what for a limit do you put on this deadfall, anyhow?'

"'The bridle's plumb off to you, Amigo,' says Cherokee, an' his tones is some hard. I notices it all right enough, because I'm doin' business at the table myse'f at the time, an' keepin' likewise an eye on the game. 'The bridle's clean off for you,' says Cherokee, 'so any notion you entertains in favour of bankruptin' of yourse'f quick may riot right along.'

"'You're dead sure of that?' says the Lizard, with a sneer. 'Now, I reckons a thousand dollar bet would scare this puerile game you deals a-screechin' up a tree or into a hole too easy.'

"'I never like to see no gent strugglin' in the coils of error,' says Cherokee, with a sneer a size larger than the Lizard's. 'I don't know what wads of wealth them pore old clothes of yours conceal, but jest the same I tells you what I'll do. Climb right on to the layout, body and soul, an' put a figger on your worthless se'f, an' I'll turn you for the whole shootin' match. You're in here to make things interestin', I can see that, an' I'll jest violate business principles, an' take a night off to entertain you.' An' yere Cherokee lugs out a roll of bills big enough to choke a cow.

"'I goes you if I lose,' says the Stingin' Lizard. Then assoomin' a superior air, he remarks: 'Mebby it's three hours back on the trail when I has misgivin's as to the rectitood of this yere brace you're dealin'. Bein' public spirited that away, in my first frenzy I allows I'll take my gun an' abate it a whole lot. But a ca'mer mood comes on, an' I decides, as not bein' so smoky as a method an' less likely to disturb a peace-lovin' camp, I removes this trap for the onwary by merely bustin' the bank. Thar,' goes on the Stingin' Lizard, at the same time dumpin' a large wad on the layout. 'Thar's even 4,000 dols. Roll your game for that just as it lays.'

"'Straighten up your dust,' says Cherokee, his eyes gettin' a kind of gleam into 'em. 'Straighten up your stuff an' get it somewhere. Don't leave it all spraddled over the scene. I turns for it ready enough, but we ain't goin' to argue none as to where it lays after the card falls.'

"The rest of us who's been buckin' the game moderate an' right cashes in at this an' leaves an obstructed cloth to the Stingin' Lizard. This yere is more caution than good nature. As long as folks is bettin' along in limits, say under 50 dols., thar ain't no shooting likely to ensoo, but whenever a game gets immoderate that away an' the limit's off, an' things is goin' that locoed they begins to play a thusand an' over on a card an' scream for action, gents of experience stand] ready to go to duckin' lead an' dodgin' bullets instanter.

"But to resoom. The Stingin' Lizard lines up his stuff an' the deal begins. It ain't thirty seconds till the bank wins, an' the Stingin' Lizard is the wrong side of the layout from his money. He takes it on onusual ugly, only he ain't sayin' much. He sa'nters over to the bar an' gets a big drink. Cherokee is rifflin' the cards, but I notes he's got his grey eye on the Stingin' Lizard, an' my respects for him increases rapid. I sees he ain't goin' to get the worst of no deal, an' stands ready to protect his game plumb through if this Lizard makes a break.

"'Do you know where I hails from?' asks the Stingin' Lizard, comin' back to Cherokee after he's hid his drink.

"'Which I shorely don't,' says Cherokee; 'I has from time to time much worthless information thrust upon me, but so far I escapes your hist'ry complete.'

"'Where I comes from, which is Texas,' says the Lizard, ignorin' of Cherokee's manner, which is some insultin', 'they teaches the babies two things—never to eat your own beef, an' never let no card thief down you.'

"'Which is mighty thrillin',' says Cherokee, 'as reminesences of your youth, but where did you get action on 'em in Arizona?'

"'Where I gets action won't be no question long,' says the Lizard, mighty truculent. 'I now announces that this yere game is a skin an' a brace. Tharfore, I returns for my money, an' to be frank an' not hold out nuthin' on to you, I returns a-shootin'.'

"It's at this p'int we all who represents the public kicks back our chairs an' stampedes outen range. As the Lizard makes his bluff, his hand goes to his artillery like a flash.

"The Lizard's some quick, but Cherokee's too soon for him. With the first movement of the Lizard's hand he searches out a bowie from some'er back of his neck. I'm so employed placin' myse'f at the time, an' don't discern it none till Cherokee brings it over his shoulder like a stream of white light.

"It's sure great knife work. Cherokee gives the Lizard aige an' p'int, an' all in one motion. Before the Lizard more'n lifts his weapon Cherokee half slashes his gun hand off at the wrist, an' jest as the Lizard begins to wonder at it, he gets the nine-inch blade plump through his neck. He's let out right thar.

"'It looks like I has more of this sort of thing to do,' says Cherokee, an' his tone shows he's half mournin' over it, 'than any sport in the territory; I tries to keep outen this, but that Lizard would have it.'

"After the killin', Enright an' Doc. Peets with Boggs, Tutt, an' Jack Moore, sorter talks it over quiet, an' allows it's all right.

"'This Stingin' Lizard man,' says Enright, 'has been projectin' round lustin' for trouble now mebby it's six weeks. It's amazin' to me he lasts as long as he does, an' it speaks volumes for the forbearin', law-abidin' temper of the Wolfville public. This Lizard's a mighty oppressive person, an' a heap obnoxious, an' while I don't like a knife none myse'f as a trail out, an' inclines to distrust folks who does, I s'pose it's after all partly a matter of taste, an' partly the way your folks bring you up. I leans to the view, gents, that this yere corpse is constructed on the square. What do you all think, Peets?'

"'I entertains ideas similar,' says Doc. Peets. 'Of course, I takes it this cardsharp, Cherokee, aims to bury his game. He nacherally ain't lookin' for the camp to go 'round cleanin' up after him none.'

"That's about how it stands. Nobody finds fault with Cherokee; an' as he ups an' plants the Stingin' Lizard's remainder the next day, makin' the deal with a stained box, crêpe, an' the full regalia, it all leaves the camp with a mighty decent impression. By first drink time in the evenin' of the second day we ain't thinkin' no more 'bout it.

"Now, you all begins to marvel where do we get to the hangin' of Cherokee Hall. We're workin' in towards it now.

"You see, followin' the Stingin' Lizard's jump into the misty beyond—which it's that sudden I offers two to one them angels notes a look of surprise on the Stingin' Lizard's face as to how he comes to make the trip—Cherokee goes on dealin' faro same as usual. As I says before, he ain't no talker nohow; now he says less than ever.

"But what strikes us as onusual is he saddles up a pinto pony he's got over to the corral, an' jumps off every now an' then for two an' three days at a clatter. No one knows where he p'ints to, more'n he says he's due over in Tucson. These yere vacations of Cherokee is all in the month after the Stingin' Lizard gets downed.

"It's about this time, too, the stage gets held up sech a scandalous number of times, it gives people a tired feelin'. All by one man, too. He merely jumps out in onexpected places in an onconsarned way, an' then goes through everything an' everybody, from mail bags to passengers, like the grace of heavin' through a camp meetin'. Nacheral, it all creates a heap of disgust.

"'If this yere industrious hold-up keeps up his lick,' says Texas Thompson, about the third time the stage gets rustled, 'an' heads off a few more letters of mine, all I has to say is my wife back in Laredo ain't goin' to onderstand it none. She ain't lottin' much on me, nohow, an' if the correspondence between us gets much more irregular, she's goin' p'intin' out for a divorce. This deal's liable to turn a split for me in my domestic affairs.'

"An' that's the way we all feels. This stage agent was shorely in disrepoot some in Wolfville. If he'd been shakin' up Red Dog's letter bag, we wouldn't have minded so much.

"I never does know who's the first to think of Cherokee Hall. But all at once it's all over camp. Talkin' it over, it's noticed mighty soon that come right to cases, no one knows his record, where he's been, or why he's here. Then his stampedin' out of camp like he's been doin' for a month is too many for us.

"'I puts no trust in those Tucson lies he tells, neither,' says Doc. Peets. 'Whatever would he be shakin' up over in Tucson? His game's yere, an' this theery that he's got to go scatterin' over thar once or twict a week is some gauzy.

"'That's whatever,' says Dan Boggs, who allers trails in after Doc. Peets an' plays the same system emphatic. An' I says myse'f, not findin' no fault with Boggs tharfor, that this yere Peets was the finest eddicated an' levelest-headed sharp in Arizona.

"'Well,' says Jack Moore, who does the rope-work for the stranglers, 'if you all get it settled that this faro gent's turnin' these tricks with the stage mail-bags, the sooner he's swingin' to the windmill the sooner we hears from our loved ones at home. What do you say, Enright?'

"'Why,' says Enright, all thoughtful, 'I reckon it's a case. S'pose you caper over where he feeds, at the O.K. House, an' bring him to us. The signs and signal smokes shorely p'ints to this yere Cherokee as our meat; but, of course, these things has to be done in order. Bring him in, Jack; and, to save another trip, s'pose you brings a lariat from the corral at the same time.'

"It don't take Moore any time to throw a gun on Cherokee where he's consoomin' flap-jacks at the O.K. House, an' tells him the committee needs him at the New York store. Cherokee don't buck none, but comes along passive as a tabby cat.

"'Whatever's the hock card to all this?' he says to Jack Moore. 'Is it the Stingin' Lizard play a month ago?'

"'No,' says Moore, ''tain't quite sech ancient hist'ry. It's stage coaches. Thar's a passel of people down yere as allows you've been ruslin' the mails.'

"Old Man Rucker, who keeps the O.K. House, is away when Moore rounds up his man. But Mrs. Rucker's thar, an' the way that old woman talks to Enright an' the committee is scand'lous. She comes over to the store, too, along of Moore an' Cherokee, an' prances in an' comes mighty near stampedin' the whole outfit.

"'See yere, Sam Enright,' she shouts, wipin' her hands on her bib, 'what be you all aimin' to do? Linin' up, I s'pose, to hang the only decent man in town?'

"'Ma'am,' says Enright, 'this yere sharp is 'cused of standin' up the stage them times recent over by Tucson. Do you know anything about it?'

"'No, I don't,' says Mrs. Rucker. 'You don't reckon now I did it none, do you? I says this, though; it's a heap sight more likely some drunkherd a-settin' right yere on this committee stops them stages than Cherokee Hall.'

"'Woman's nature is that emotional,' says Enright to the rest of us. 'She's incapable of doin' right. While she's the loveliest of created things, still sech is the infirmities of her intellects that gover'ment would bog down in its most important functions if left to woman.'

"'Bog down or not,' says Mrs. Rucker, gettin' red an' heated. 'You fools settin' up thar like a band of prairie dogs don't hang this yere Cherokee Hall. 'Nuther thing, you ain't goin' to hang nobody to the windmill ag'in, nohow. I has my work to do, an' thar's enough on my hands feedin' sech as you alls three times a day without havin' to cut down a corpse outen my way every time I goes for a bucket of water. You all takes notice, now; you don't hang nothin' to the windmill no more. And for this yere Cherokee, he ain't stopped no more stages than I have.'

"'Well, see here,' says Cherokee, who's been listenin' all peaceful, 'let me in on this. What be you all doin' this on? I reckon I'm entitled to a turn for my money.'

"Enright goes on an' lays it off for Cherokee; how he's outen camp every time the stage is robbed, an' the idee is abroad he does it.

"'As the cards lay in the box,' says Cherokee, 'I don't reckon there's much doubt but you all will wind up the deal by hangin' me?'

"'It's shorely five to one that away,' says Enright; 'although I'm bound to say, it ain't none decisive as yet.'

"'The truth is,' says Cherokee, sorter thoughtful. 'I wasn't aimin' to be hung none this autumn. I ain't got time, gents, for one thing, an' has arranged a heap different. In the next place, I never stands up no stages.'

"'That's what they all says,' puts in Boggs, who's a mighty impatient man. 'I shorely notes no reason why we all can't proceed with this yere lynchin' at once. S'pose this Cherokee ain't stood up no stage, I offers 100 dols. to 50 dols., an' leaves it to the culprit himse'f; he's done plenty of other things as merits death. It strikes me thar's a sight of onnecessary talk yere.'

"'If you ain't out workin' the road,' says Doc. Peets to Cherokee, not heedin' of Bogg's petulence, 'these yere stage robbin' times, s'pose you onfold where you was at.'

"'Well, son, not to string this yere story out longer'n three drinks, here is how it is: This Cherokee looks like he's soft-hearted that away, what you calls romantic. An' it seems likewise that shovin' the Stingin' Lizard from shore that time sorter takes advantage an' preys on him. So he gets browsin' 'round the postmaster all casual and puts questions. Cherokee gets a p'int about some yearlin' or other in Tucson this Stingin' Lizard sends money to, an' makes good for, which he finds the same to be true on caperin' over. It's a nephy or some sech play, an' the Stingin' Lizard has the young one staked out over thar, an' is puttin' up for his raiment an' grub all reg'lar enough.

"'Which I yereafter backs this infant's play myse'f,' says Cherokee to the barkeep at the Oriental saloon which is the party the Stingin' Lizard pastures the young one on. 'So you're all right, Bill,' goes on this yere Cherokee to the barkeep, 'but now I goes back of the box for this infant boy I reckons I'll saw him off into a preacher or some sharp similar, whar he gets a Christian example. Whatever do you think?'

"The barkeep says himself he allows it's the play to make. So he an' Cherokee goes surgin' round an' at last they camps the boy—who's seven years comin' grass—on the only sky pilot in Tucson. This gospel spreader says he'll feed and bed down the boy for some sum, which was shore a giant one, but the figgers I now forgets.

"Cherokee gives him a stack of blues to start his game, an' is now pesterin' 'round in a court tryin' to get the young one counter branded from the Stingin' Lizard's outfit into his, and giving the name of Cherokee Hall. That's what takes him over to Tucson them times, an' not stage robbin'.

"Two days later, in fact, to make shore all doubts is over, Cherokee even rings in said divine on us; which he tells the same story. I don't reckon now he's much of a preacher neither, for he gives Wolfville one whirl for luck over in the warehouse back of the New York store, an' I shore hears 'em as makes a mighty sight more noise, an' bangs a Bible twict as hard back in the States.

"I says so to Cherokee, but he puts it up he don't bank none on his preachin'.

"'What I aims at,' says Cherokee, 'is some one who rides herd on the boy all right, an' don't let him stampede off none into vicious ways.'

"'Why don't you keep the camp inform'd of this yere orphan an' the play you makes?' says Enright at the same time it's explained to the committee—the time they trees Cherokee about them stages.

"'It's that mushy,' says Cherokee, 'I'm some ashamed of the deal, an' don't allow to go postin' no notices thereof. But along comes this yere hold-up business an' all inadvertent tips my hand; which the same I stands, however, jest the same.'

"'It's all right,' says Enright, some disgusted though, 'but the next time you makes these foundling asylum trips, don't walk in the water so much. Leave your trail so Wolfville sees it, an' then folks ain't so likely to jump your camp in the dark an' take to shoutin' into you for Injuns an' similar hostiles.'"

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A Plucky Young Woman.

MR. WILLIAM HOUNSLOW, otherwise Burglar Bill, followed his bundle of swag over the low window-sill on to the ground-floor verandah. Then he removed the somewhat warm and uncomfortable mask that coyly veiled his features from chance comers during active business hours, and indulged in a self-congratulatory stretch. The haul had been highly satisfactory, but the delicacy of his situation, and the enforced constraint of his attitude, had taxed all his muscles and nerves.

His indiscretion was momentary, but it sufficed. There was a hand on his arm, and a voice in his ear—a woman's voice, as he recognised, even as his hand went down to his revolver.

"Oh, my gracious! Do come and help me! It's a burglar, I know, and I am so frightened! Come, quick!"

"But I—I don't know you, miss!" stammered Bill, at a loss what else to say.

"Goodness, no! Nor I you; but you're not going to stand on ceremony, are you? Here's the side door, and I want you to go over every foot of the house with me; and don't wake the baby, if you can help it!"

"Trust me for that, miss," he replied gallantly, falling into the spirit of the adventure. "I'm a very quiet and light-footed fellow, and sometimes it seems as if the kids slept sounder than ever when I'm round"—as he thought of the chloroform in his kit.

"Oh, thank you! Would you mind going through the dining-room first, please? He's taken a lot; all the solid silver, I fancy—though how they can tell it from the plated, with nothing but a dark lantern, and being naturally in a hurry——"

"Just a minute, miss, if you please. I know ladies are scared of firearms, but this is a ticklish job, and I'd like my revolver handy."

"Oh, I hope you won't shoot anybody. Here's the library—you don't suppose he's under the couch?"

"Well, no, miss, I should say not. What with ladies looking under the bed regular before retiring, and it being cramped quarters anyhow—but you can look if you want to, miss."

"I'd rather you would."

He regarded her reproachfully. "An' have a feller light ker-whack on my back? No, miss; that's a risk I never take in my business. But you might shove this poker under, an' see what comes of it."

A number of energetic proddings, accompanied by suppressed "Shoos!" and "Scats!" brought no response.

"You're sure he isn't under it?"

"I'll take my oath on it, miss. Hullo, that door's shut!"

"Yes, I shut and bolted it myself, behind me. There, I've unbolted it; would you mind opening it, please?"

Very cautiously the gallant William walked up to the door, his cocked revolver covering the latch. "You can't be too careful, miss," he observed. "A cracksman—er—a burglar, miss, generally goes armed."

"The awful wretches! But there, they do take their lives in their hands, don't they? And you can't blame them for being cautious."

"Now don't you get sentimental, miss. Sentiment's always interfering with justice, as I know."

"How you must have suffered from it to speak so bitterly! You have had many trials, have you not?"

"Trials? Well, rather. But I've generally been acquit—ahem! Would you mind getting a little farther back—rather more to the left, miss?"

One hand is on the door knob, turning it with an almost imperceptible movement of the wrist; the other holds the revolver as in a vice, levelled full at the angle between the door and the jamb. The door opens half an inch or so to his slow and noiseless pressure. Suddenly a weight drags down his right arm. There is a quick push, accompanied by the swish of drapery, and the door swings wide. Strong arms pinion his own behind his back.

"It's no use, my man. Drop it; game's up."

This the young lady hears vaguely, as from a far distance, as she drops fainting under the patent burglar alarm that her fingers pressed ten minutes—or was it a year, or a century—ago?

Burglar Bill's sentence was for fifteen years. He gave the prison chaplain a full account of his latest misadventure in cracking a crib; and what he thought of his fair captor's proceedings is best told in his own words:

"I'm not denying that the girl had pluck; all the same, sir, I'm glad, for the credit of our sex, that it was a woman. Of course, a man couldn't ha' done it, but if he could, he wouldn't. He wouldn't ha' had the cheek, an' he'd 'a' been above taking in a feller that way. But women—a woman's up to any manners of games."

ARTHUR CHAMBERLAIN.

The Story of a Lost Love

ONCE THERE was a beautiful woman married happily, and a mother. Her husband had a friend—a man of the world. This man discovered in his friend's wife an accumulation of all womanly graces; he saw in her the ideal woman, in all the world; the only one he could have loved and courted, fought for and died for. Yet she was wholly inaccessible, even in dreams. She was as good as she was beautiful, as true as she was winsome. Even had she not been so, his hands were tied by loyalty to his friend. Some of you will laugh at that. Well, if a man's honour fails him in one direction, I will not trust it in another; for a man is a whole remainder after abstracting all his evil from all his good. But "the flesh is weak." That is the villain's only plea for mercy.

The friend could not conceal it from the wife. *Could* not? I must be careful in my choice of words. Is there anything in the line of right that a man cannot do in such a case? The world is wide—he could have gone away; but she was so beautiful and winsome! Nor, as he had not declared himself, could she presume to send him away. He thought he saw in her eyes something of pity, something of warning, something of everything. The suffering wore him out.

But I must return to the beginning and resume my story.

I was much prostrated in mind and flesh, and the services of a skilful physician were eminently needed. With that idea I went to see a famous man, Dr. Brownell, a specialist in matters of the nerves. It may be thought a little peculiar that I went to consult this particular man, but it must be considered that besides being a very skilful physician, he was my friend. There might have been certain reasons why I should not consult him, but we need not discuss them now. His wife was a beautiful woman, and I knew her well; but what in the world has this to do with my visit to her husband?

Brownell was a peculiar man. Though he was the best friend I ever had, there was not a very close intimacy between us; and yet I was nearer to him than any other of his friends. He was much older than his wife. A kind heart, given force and direction by great wealth, had been exercised by him in my behalf with so intelligent a purpose that I became a man of some little importance in the community.

The physician lived in a fine old house of great size; not all of it was occupied. He was a tireless collector of curiosities, and had expended a fortune in that pursuit. Few of these were ever shown to his friends, and he never spoke of them, but kept them in out-of-the-way places in the great establishment. He was a reticent man, and many feared him, but I saw nothing in him but goodness and a marvellous skill.

So it was upon Dr. Brownell that I called formally as a patient. His office was on the main floor of the house, and consisted of two rooms—a handsomely fitted reception room, and at the back of it one in which his patients consulted him. Each was very large. Although I had called and visited very often at his house, I had never been in his office before.

When I entered he was just ready to go out, but he welcomed me with his old-time cordiality.

"Why, I am glad to see you," he said, taking my hand; "this is the first time you have honoured my house with a call. Come in and rest awhile. You surely haven't come to see me professionally?" He looked closely at me as he asked the question.

"Yes," I replied. "I fear I am in rather a bad way." His face showed much concern.

"You do look a little shaken," said he, removing one of his gloves. Then he began in a deliberate fashion to make a scientific inquiry into my case. While he was occupied thus a messenger, all out of breath, arrived to call him to a case of urgency. Dr. Brownell, seeing the need to hurry, asked me if I could come as well on the following day. Of course, I released him. He hurried away saying:

"I am very sorry to leave you, but it can't be helped. Step into the house and see Mrs. Brownell. I am sure she will be glad to see you. Go through that door, it is the nearest way. You will find the hall a little dark, but go straight ahead and you will be all right."

Then he hurried away, and in a moment I was alone.

I went to the door which I understood him to have pointed out. It was the consulting room. I discovered that there were two doors together. Selecting the left-hand one, I turned the knob and pulled the door open. The hall beyond appeared to be quite dark, but I remembered what he had said about that, and I felt safe.

I stepped into the hall, and instantly the door, which was a heavy affair made of oak, closed upon me, pushing me out of its way into the hall. Then I discovered that I was in absolute darkness, although there was a bright day without.

Nevertheless, recalling Brownell's instructions, I went ahead with much confidence. Suddenly, to my infinite amazement, the ground seemed to open, and I plunged headlong downwards into a suffocating darkness, at every instant striking cruelly upon hidden obstacles along the way.

At last, after having taken what seemed to be a great flight, I came heavily to a stone floor, where the darkness was intense.

Fright was my first sensation, and indignation my next; for was it not likely that Brownell had played some ugly trick upon me? I sat perfectly still for a little while, doing much wondering.

A little reason found exercise in my disordered faculties. I reflected that the abyss into which I had fallen was an unguarded flight of stairs, into which I had walked in the darkness. A cautious hand-survey verified the belief, for there I lay at the bottom of the stairs.

A moment later I remembered that I had noticed two doors, one beside the other. It was very clear that I had made a mistake by choosing a door leading to the cellar. It was then no serious matter at all, and I laughed at myself for my terror.

All that was necessary was to ascend the flight, open the door, and emerge by the other. Without any waste of time I went about putting this plan into use; but when I had clambered up the stairs and found the door, I discovered that I was securely locked within this dismal place! There was no knob on the outside at all.

My first intention was to get relief by knocking on the door; but there quickly arose two reasons why I should not—no one was within, and besides, even if I should summon attention, how could I explain my ridiculous plight? My clothing had been torn by my fall, and I knew by the token of a warm, sticky sensation about my face and neck that I had been hurt, and was bleeding freely!

Accordingly I descended the stairs, and by keeping my hand on one of the walls began to creep forward, with a careful guard upon the possibility of another flight of stairs. Presently I found a turn in the passage, and followed it on. I came to a transverse passage, and was in doubt which way to turn. Meanwhile the darkness did not relax in the smallest way, and absolute silence reigned on every side.

I turned to the right, and in that direction, not far away, I saw an exceedingly thin line of light, which I surmised issued from the bottom of a door. I went towards this, and was about to put my hand upon the door, when it occurred to me that caution sometimes was a valuable exercise. Thereupon I knelt and examined the line of light more closely; and it was somewhat disheartening to discover that instead of being white it was yellow. In other words, it was gaslight and not daylight that shone beyond the door. While thus I knelt I thought I heard a certain scurring within. It was a sound not very unlike that which I had mistaken for automatic aberration of my hearing sense. Now the same sound gave me a certain depressing feeling of insecurity, as though a malign mystery, suited to this uncanny place, was preparing a grotesque, and perhaps dangerous, reception for me.

Should I abandon this enterprise and seek another door? There was danger that I might not find this one again. Indeed, was there anything to fear? Surely, my conscience—I gently pushed against the door.

It did not open. I found a keyhole and peeped through it! A curious large hall seemed to be beyond, lighted faintly, and I thought I saw the shadowy form of a woman float across the field of vision.

Just above the keyhole I found a knob. I turned it, and instantly the door flew open, pulling me violently with it; and before the instinctive movement to seize upon a support and hold it securely permitted me to take my grasp of the knob, I found myself wholly at the mercy of unresisted gravitation, flying undoubtedly downwards.

Upon looking about I found myself in the strangest place it was ever my fortune to see; but before I describe it I must say something in explanation of my unaccountable flight through the air.

The floor of this hall was sunk a few feet below the level of the passage by which I had approached, and down from the door led a flight of stone steps, which the pulling of the door had made me to clear as I fell.

I had thought that someone was concealed behind the door, and pulled it open quickly when I turned the knob; but upon looking I saw no one, and I must believe that for some reason, which I shall not attempt to explain, the conduct of the door was guided by a powerful spring.

There was no time for any intelligent kind of thinking, for, besides being in a large hall of extraordinary appearance, I found myself in the company of the most astonishing people. The walls were covered with curious things from every corner of the world. The roof was perforated with openings, representing stars, animals, angels, demons, and other things. These openings were covered with coloured glass of every shade, and above all was the light which shone through the grotesque openings, and filled the room with a soft, yellow radiance.

The light was too faint for a fine definition of feature, and so I could not then have said that I knew any of the persons present. They were all on the opposite side of the room, and every one of them was looking at me. Some were sitting, others standing, and all were upon an elevated platform which ran round the room. This platform was raised not more than eight inches above the floor.

I scrambled to my feet and looked round upon them, of course expecting that I should be spoken to. But not a word was said and not a movement was made. The whole circumstance was so extraordinary, and the silence and immovability of the assembled people so impressive, that a strange tingling feeling of which all who have been frightened know the nature, crept up my face and into my hair, and my heart beat with what seemed to be so strong a torsional force that it twisted a sharp pain out of its functions. I made an essay of speech.

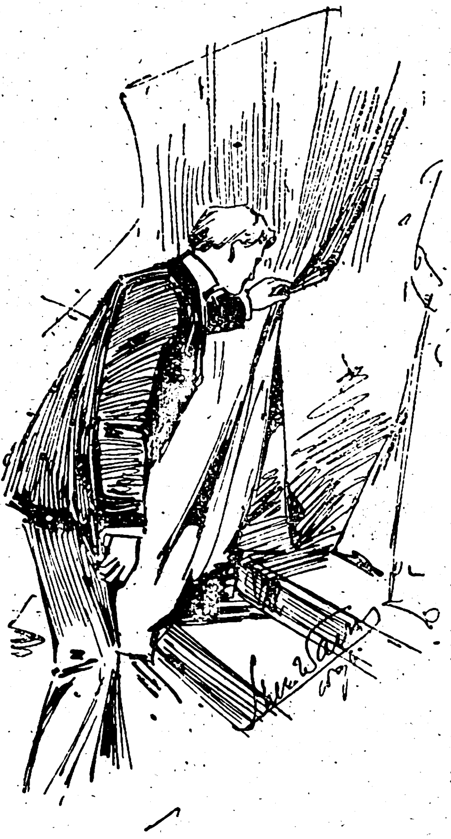
"This," I said, indignation arising with the advent of courage, "may be a very amusing pastime for you, but I think it that you are putting a very gross indignity upon me. If Dr. Brownell is in this distinguished company I would like him to hear me say that I resent being made the victim of this boyish prank for the edification of spectators invited to enjoy my discomfiture, and I propose, without any loss of time, to give to my resentment such form and character as will cause it to have a disagreeable permanency in his recollection."

The wide-winged and rather silly threat might as well have been spoken to the red dragons and green angels in the ceiling, for not a word or movement did it elicit. I found it easy to speak, but my voice sounded as though it had come from someone else to me alone, and that made me uncertain that I had spoken at all.

But a quickening anger was straining its leash within me, and I made no effort to control it. A sense of outrage, shame, and indignation swept over me; these were things I could not bear.

At this moment Brownell's individuality emerged from the dim shadows of the company, and I walked straight up to him.

He looked at me steadily as I approached—the old, good-natured, half-quizzical expression that I knew so well sitting upon his face. I had approached very near him, when an indefinable violent sensation seized upon me and held me from further advance. Probably it was as much dread as terror; but whatever it was, there I stood rooted to the floor, staring in dismay at this silent and motionless man with the quizzical expression.



I went without further thinking to the portière.

Quite near me was an old man sitting in a chair, his hand resting on a heavy stick. I seized the stick and tried to wrench it from his grasp, intending to brain Brownell with it; but imagine what must have been my horror to see the old man's arm come away from his body with the stick, the hand still retaining its hold! I threw the stick away with a shudder, and went up closer to Brownell.

I caught him by the shoulders, and shook him with such violence that his head rolled off on the floor by my feet. Then the truth burst the envelope of my vast and inconceivable stupidity—not all stupidity, for another affliction beset me—these were all wax figures! I had stumbled into one of those queer nooks in Brownell's house where some of his treasures were stored, and where, in these uncanny ways, he enjoyed himself alone.

The reaction from this discovery was peculiar. At first I laughed, but my laughter became so loud and furious that I saw it was hysteria, and then I had trouble to check it. My head was splitting, and my throat was cracked and burning. Pains of various kinds found employment in torturing me, and they were pains to which I was in no wise accustomed.

Therefore it was necessary that I should make haste to escape from this almost unearthly place. The silence and apparent intelligent immobillity of the wax figures were more than depressing. I began to fear, indeed, that after all they would take on life and present some new form of suffering for my torture.

At the end of the hall was a wide door with a *portière*. From where I stood I could see the white satin of a woman's skirt just behind the *portière* on one side.

Evidently no light entered the room except the weak, diffused light of the demons and angels in the room where I was standing, and hence it was much darker beyond the *portière*; but after looking round I saw that if there was any escape, except by the way I had come, it must be through the room in which stood the woman in satin.

Yet I feared to enter that room. The dim light, the woman behind the *portière*—it all looked mysterious and dread-lurking. It was evident that the woman did not stand as did the others, on a platform; but was that sufficient upon which to construct a belief that she was not of wax? and would it not be all the better if she were flesh and blood? Assuredly, for that meant deliverance. I went without further thinking to the *portierè* and passed within the room, having an unaccountable care that I did not pass too near the woman in satin. I went into the room and looked round for a door. None could I find.

My gaze fell upon the woman whose skirt I had seen, and then came upon me the very heaviest blow of all in that day of miseries, for there before me, beautiful and radiant, embodiment of all the finest graces of woman kind, unspeakably winsome, and in every possible way the loveliest woman under the sun, stood the physician's wife.

If only it had been she, indeed, instead of an artful wax counterfeit! I stood and admired her to my heart's content, and then I looked another way, and continued my search for the door.

In which ever way I turned I felt that the soft blue eyes of this enchanting figure were upon me. This gave me a certain fear, which, beyond a consciousness of extreme irritation, I was not able to understand. My disorder began to take on an exhilaration much like that which comes from hashish, imparting a quickening power to my senses, and a keen edge to my imagination. A feeling of happy confidence and lively enthusiasm struck off the angles of the fear which formerly had depressed me, and I became bold, valiant, and adventurous.

What an inspiring effect even the wax image of a beautiful woman may have on a man! I again looked at the figure in satin. Could I have been in error? Was it possible that a wax figure could be caught stealing a quick glance at me, and suppressing a delicious smile?

A great hope, so wild that I dare not give it too generous entertainment, leapt up from my heart. Fool or madman—which was I? Though the whole world might be consumed with love of her, she would remain steadfast in the way of a wife for ever. It was wholly impossible that she should choose this astounding way of letting me know that the one secret of my life had slipped away from me, and had been welcomed into her own life.

I gazed upon her, filled with awe—her head slowly turned, her glorious eyes rested full upon my face, and the sweetest smile that I had ever seen on her beautiful face saturated all my sensibilities with inconceivable delights. There was a meaning in that look and smile that I had never seen before, and the light that shone through it was a welcome to me!

I went closer to her, my feet winged with joy. The smile beckoned, the glance was a reassurance!

"Alice!" I cried.

"I have waited for you long," she answered; and there can be no music on earth so sweet as those words.

I caught her in my arms and drew her to my breast, nearly crushing her. I looked up into her face, and she looked down into mine. All at once a look of horror came into her face.

"You are bloody!" she cried.

"It is nothing," I protested.

The look of horror became one of terror.

"Oh," she said, "there is blood on your face and villainy in your heart! So this is how you would betray your best friend, and wreck my life? I will save him and you."

With that I saw something bright and keen glitter a moment in her hand, and, in an instant, a thing cold and sharp slipped behind the ribs of my breast. I choked; a blindness assailed me, and I felt myself falling all at once to the floor.

* * * * *

Dr. Brownell was sitting beside me in a room of his house, and I was lying in bed with a feeling of great weakness. He arose and stood over me, and his face showed much relief.

"You are all right now, aren't you, old fellow?"

How kind his voice was!

"Yes."

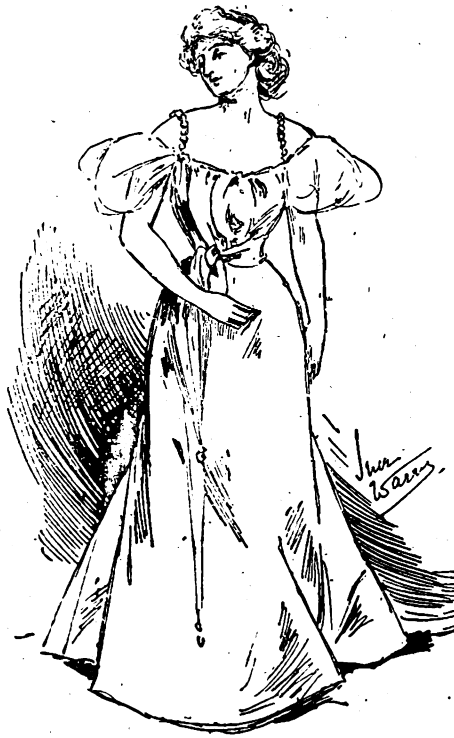
I felt no pain in my breast, but feebly I put up my hand.

"Is the wound dangerous?" I asked.

"What wound?"

I made no reply.

"The only wound you had was a slight abrasion of the scalp, and that has been cured a week."

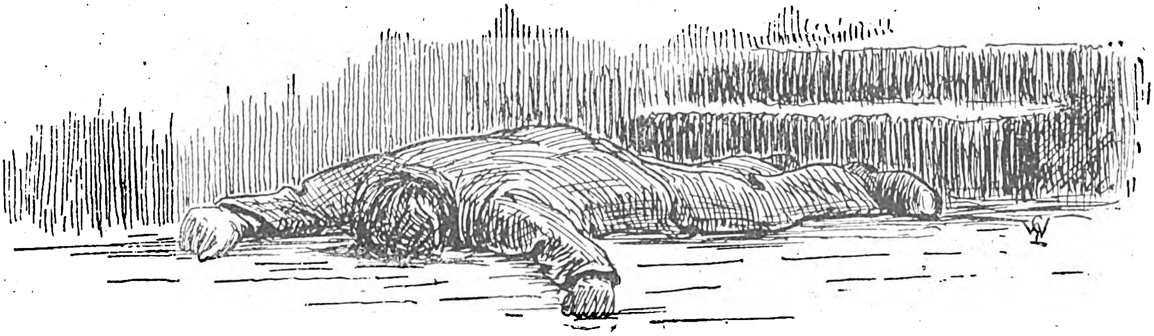


In every possible way the loveliest woman under the sun.

I dare not ask any more questions.

"Alice came in to see you this morning, and left these flowers for you. I told her I thought you would be all right to-day, and she will come to see you as soon as I send her word. By the way, old man, that was a curious mistake you made in getting among my wax figures. We found you unconscious. In your delirium you must have developed a strong dislike for the figures of Alice and me, as you completely demolished them."

Annie Davis.



ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

A LITTLE over three years ago I had some business to do for my firm in Edinburgh, and took the 8.30 p.m. express from King's Cross. I had selected a comfortable first-class smoking compartment, and was congratulating myself that I should have it to myself, at any rate until the train reached Grantham, which was the first stop, when just as the guard was blowing his whistle, the door of the carriage opened and a man got in and ensconced himself in the corner on the opposite side of the carriage to the seat which I had taken.

By the time the train had cleared the outskirts of London I had got over the unreasonable sort of displeasure that the average British traveller usually experiences under such circumstances, and was chatting amicably with the stranger, who was a good-looking young fellow of about my own age, well-informed, and with pleasant, engaging manners, which were, however, somewhat discounted by a somewhat curious look about the eyes, and certain signs of dissipation which could not easily escape the eye of one as accustomed to business dealings with all sorts of people as I was.

From commonplace subjects our conversation gradually veered round to a burglary which had taken place a few weeks previously, and in which the still undiscovered criminals had escaped by shooting the only policeman on the scene before he had time to raise any alarm.

This, in its turn, brought the conversation to firearms, and I happened to let out the fact that I once had a narrow escape of my life when travelling in charge of some valuable property, and that ever since then I had carried a revolver while on my travels. This appeared to rouse the curiosity of my fellow-traveller, and he asked me whether I had my revolver with me then. Thinking no evil I said: "Yes, here it is," and put my hand to the pistol-pocket that I always had made in my trousers in the American style, and foolishly pulled it out.

As I did so, he held out his hand and said:

"Ah, that's a pretty-looking weapon—very pretty. Would you mind letting me have a look at it?"

It was a very foolish thing to do, but I suppose most men would have done the same thing under similar circumstances, and I handed it to him with the remark:

"Yes, it's a very handy little tool in an emergency, but handle it gently because it is loaded, and those things have a nasty way of going off when you don't mean them to do so."

"Oh, that's all right," he said. "I'm accustomed to handle these things. We carry them much more frequently in South Africa than you do in England."

"Oh!" I said. "Do you come from South Africa?"

"Yes," he replied. "I am in business in Cape Town—at least, I represent an English firm there."

"Indeed!" I said. "Do you happen to know a man named Roger Stanton out there?"

"Yes, I do, very well," he answered, looking up at me with a curious blink in his eyes. "Why do you ask?"

"Because the firm I'm connected with has a representative out there, and that is his name."

"Oh, indeed. And may I ask whether this is your name on the pistol?" he said, putting his finger on a little silver plate on the butt of the revolver.

"Yes," I answered, "that's my name. Frank Austen, at your service. But, come, I think you had better give me the pistol back. You might drop it, handling it like that."

While we had been talking, he had been turning the weapon over and over in his fingers in a nervous sort of way that made me speak as I did. For a few moments he kept his head bent over the pistol, still turning it round and round in his fingers, and when he looked up again his face was white to the lips and so distorted with suppressed passion that I positively hardly recognised it.

For an instant he seemed to be trying to shape words that his lips refused to utter, and then he forced himself to speak, and the words came out in a thick, guttural sort of voice, that was totally unlike that in which he had so far spoken.

"So ho! you are Frank Austen, are you? The young gentleman with the brilliant prospects, travelling manager to Macdonald's, and the successful lover of Maggie Macdonald; probable partner, and that sort of thing, eh? Well, Frank Austen, my name is Roger Stanton, and I am the man whose failure means your success; whose life your good luck has ruined; the man who loves Maggie Macdonald a thousand times more than your cold-blooded respectable nature could ever love anybody."

"Give me back that pistol," I said sharply, making a grab at it as I spoke. "If I'd known who you were——"

"You'd never have given it to me, would you? No, I don't suppose you would; but as it is you have done so, and, what's more, I'm going to use it."

While he was thus speaking, with a quick sinuous movement of his body he had wriggled out of the seat in front of me, and got to the other end of the compartment, pointing the barrel of the pistol towards me and keeping his hand on the trigger.

It was a self-cocking revolver, and I knew that he had but to pull his finger back to put a bullet through me. To get the pistol from him as matters stood was an impossibility. He had the drop on me, as they say in America, and for the time being I was at his mercy, consequently I threw myself back in my seat and said as steadily as I could:

"And so I suppose you mean to murder me with my own pistol, just because I have been successful where you have failed, and because a girl loves me who never could have loved you? Well, if you are mad enough to do it, do it. The end will be the same. We are alone in the carriage, the guard saw you get in here with me, and you can't get out till the train stops at Grantham."

While I was saying this I had taken hold of the window-strap and pulled it off the button, then I dropped the window suddenly, jumped up in my seat, and put my hand out to catch hold of the cord, intending to pull it and call the attention of the guard. He watched me, still keeping the barrel of the pistol pointed towards me, and said, with a fiendish leer on his white face:

"Pull away my friend. You're on the wrong side. The cord's on this side. Now sit down again and listen to me."

I groped about for the cord and found none. Then I threw myself back into my seat prepared to face the worst, and said:

"Go on. What have you got to say?"

"Not much," he said, now speaking passionately, and rushing his words out breathlessly. "I'm not going to shoot you, don't be afraid. Right or wrong I hate you a good deal too much for that.

"My own life is worthless to me. You have chiefly made it so, and bad luck has done the rest. This is your pistol, and, as you say, the train doesn't stop till it gets to Grantham, so it's you that will be found in the carriage alone with a corpse with a bullet out of your pistol in its head. See? Now marry Maggie Macdonald if you can."

I sprang out of my seat and rushed at him, but before I reached him he had put the pistol to his temple. There was a flash and a sharp crack.

At the same moment the train suddenly slackened speed, and the jerk flung his body forward and threw it at my feet, the blood from the wound, which had divided the temporal artery, spurting out over the lower part of one leg of my trousers.

I staggered back horror-stricken to my seat, staring blankly at the body which lay motionless on the floor. In that one terrible moment I saw nothing and thought of nothing but the tragedy of which I was the sole witness. But a few minutes later I remembered that at the moment that the train slackened speed another one passed it, and by the lights I knew it must be a passenger train.

For what may have been half an hour or more, the train, which had immediately quickened up again, sped onwards through the darkness, and gradually the power of thinking returned to me. My first impulse was to pull the cord, call the attention of the guard, and tell him the whole story exactly as it had happened, trusting to my own unblemished character and the peculiar relationship in which the dead man stood to me to clear me of suspicion.

If I had done so all might have been well, and I might have been spared, myself and those who were dear to me, a period of terrible suffering. But I did not do so; for I remembered the other train passing, and the horrible thought flashed upon me that it was quite possible that someone might have been looking out of the window of it, and seen me standing for that fatal instant with the corpse at my feet. They would have had no time to take in details, and what they had seen would be enough to destroy all belief in any story that I might tell.

With this thought came panic—that blind, unreasoning panic which seizes alike the innocent and the guilty at times, and leads to the commission of errors fatal and irrevocable. I had but one idea in my mind, and that was a wild, irresistible longing to escape from the carriage before the train reached Grantham, which it would do now in about forty minutes.

I looked down at my trousers and saw the blood on them. I had another pair in my portmanteau in the carriage with me. I pulled the blinds down, and in five minutes I had put on the other pair, and stuffed the blood-stained ones into my portmanteau, and rapidly locked it again.

By the time I had made the change the train slackened speed again approaching Peterborough. I knew we were not timed to stop there, but it is often necessary for the trains to run slowly from the station, and this was my chance if ever I had one.

I looked out of the window, saw the lights of the town and station nearly a mile ahead, dropped my portmanteau out on to the line and followed it as quickly as I could. I got off with a pretty severe shaking, but no serious damage, and started back down the line to find my portmanteau as soon as the train had passed on. It happened to be a very dark night, and I was not detected leaving the train.

I watched it run through Peterborough station without stopping. Then I left the line, crossed some fields, got into the town, and made my way to the station. As it happened, there was a fast train back to London in ten minutes, which I caught, and so returned to town. My plan was to get back to King's Cross, wait until the midnight train, and then go on again to Edinburgh by that, and this I carried through successfully.

I arrived in Edinburgh congratulating myself on having successfully put pursuit off the scent, but this dream was speedily dispelled, for on getting out on to the platform, the first thing that met my eye was the contents bill of *The Scotsman* with a bold line across the top:

MURDER ON THE LINE!

Underneath this was another line of smaller print, which I could not read from where I stood. I went up closer, and to my horror read: "The murderer's pistol found in the carriage."

Then, for the first time since the tragedy, I remembered that I had made the fatal omission of forgetting to pick up the pistol with which Stanton had shot himself. At the moment I thought I should have fallen prone on the platform as the truth burst in upon my mind in all its horrible distinctness.

My name was on the pistol; it was lying on the floor beside the corpse when it was found; it was known that I had left London by that train; it would be useless for me now to say, as I had intended to, that I had been detained in London, and had come on by the midnight train, and it was too late now to tell the story of the suicide, for had I not practically proclaimed my own guilt by the course of action that I had taken?

I hurried off the platform, thinking everyone's eyes were fixed upon me, and recognising me as the murderer. Outside the station I bought a copy of *The Scotsman*, and then, for the first time, I noticed another item of news. This was headed: "Alarming accident to the London Express," and told how the up-train, a few miles south of Peterborough, had collided with some trucks that had run back off a siding, and how the driver and stoker had been flung out of the engine, and stunned by the shock, though the train itself had escaped unhurt.

As I read the paragraph I saw at a glance that that must have been the train which passed the one in which I was coming north at the moment that Stanton shot himself, and I thought how paltry now seemed the chance that I had before feared so much of someone having seen me from the window. How willing I would have been to have taken that chance now in exchange for the certainty of apparent guilt conveyed by the finding of my pistol!

It would be of no use to tell here in detail how for nearly a fortnight I managed to elude pursuit by altering my personal appearance and constantly moving about from one place to another, until at length I got back to London, and was there finally run to earth in the obscure Camden Town lodging in which I had sought a hiding-place.

Suffice is to say that I was captured, and in due course tried for the wilful murder of Roger Stanton by shooting him through the head with my own pistol, which was produced in Court, and was easily shown to have fired the bullet extracted from the dead man's skull.

Of course I told my own story, but it was so improbable on the face of it, that my solicitor almost laughed at me as I told it; and at the trial my counsel advanced it in a fashion that did me a great deal more harm than good. The result was what I expected. I was found guilty and sentenced to death.

Looking at the facts as they were presented to the Court, it was almost impossible that there could have been any doubt in the minds of either judge or jury. The suicide theory was torn to shreds by the prosecuting counsel when he produced a fully-loaded revolver which had been found in the pocket of the dead man.

"Surely," he said in his address to the jury, "if Stanton had wanted to commit suicide here was the means to his hand without borrowing another weapon." Far more irresistible was the conclusion that we had had high words, presumably about our love rivalry, that he might possibly have threatened me, and that I had shot him down before he could get his pistol out of his pocket.

There were only two people in the world that believed my story, at least, so far as I knew, and these were Maggie Macdonald and her father, with whom I had some half-dozen interviews in the vain hope of discovering some means of escape from my frightful position.

It would be impossible for me to describe those interviews, or how, as the fatal day drew nearer, the agony of them deepened into despair, till at last on the day but one before that fixed for my execution I bade farewell to the only two friends I had in the world, and prepared to appear before the bar of a more far-sighted justice than that of earth.

Early in the afternoon of the day before the fatal morning I was surprised by a visit from the governor of the goal. He came to tell me that in consequence of fresh evidence that had come to light the day before, and had been laid before the Home Secretary, my sentence had been respited for seven days, pending further inquiries.

He then went on to tell me that the day before he had received a visit from the chief house-surgeon of Peterborough Hospital, in which were still lying the driver and stoker of the train that had met with an accident shortly after passing the one in which the tragedy had appened.

These two men, in consequence of the injuries they had received in the collision, had been either unconscious or delirious ever since; but for the last few days the stoker had got more coherent in his delirium, and had been constantly describing over and over again a scene exactly like that which I had described in my account of Stanton's suicide.

Careful inquiries had proved that the story I had given had tallied in every detail with the stoker's ravings, even to the fact of my having put my head out of the window to catch the cord, the moment before Stanton threatened to shoot himself.

So impressed was he with the conviction that the injured man had something on his mind of a very serious nature, and seeing also the close parallel between what he had heard from him and read as my story in the papers, he had communicated with my solicitor, and, without telling me or the Macdonalds, for fear of raising false hopes, they had gone to the Home Secretary; and he had granted a respite until the stoker should have sufficiently recovered his reason to make a formal deposition.

Before the period of the respite had elapsed, both the driver and the stoker were convalescent, and as soon as they were well enough to be examined by a magistrate, they both made independent statements, which set forth their version of what they had seen.

On approaching the train in which I was, they had seen, by the glare of the headlight of their own engine, a man thrust his head and shoulder out of one of the carriages and grope about for the cord. The arm outside had attracted their notice, and they both looked hard into the carriage as they passed.

Both the trains had slackened speed. As the engine came level with the compartment, they saw the one who had been reaching for the cord make for the man in the opposite corner with wide-open outstretched hands, as if to seize him. Both were quite sure that neither of these hands held a weapon.

In the opposite corner they saw a man half rise from his seat at the same instant, and put a pistol to his temple. Then the two trains passed each other, both quickening their pace, and a few minutes after came the collision which had closed the mouths of these, the only two witnesses of the tragedy, for more than a month.

The next day I was taken, in the charge of two warders, to the hospital, and identified as the man who had put his arm out of the carriage to seize the cord, and whom they had afterwards seen making for the other man with the pistol, as though to deprive him of it.

As both the men were absolutely agreed that I was not the one who had the pistol, and who was the one who tried to call the attention of the guard, and as, indeed, their depositions bore out my own extremely improbable story to the very letter, my unconditional release was ordered the same night, and so from the very shadow of the scaffold I was restored to the sunshine of life and love.

We talk of that evil time as little as possible, but more than once both my wife and myself have caught ourselves thinking with a shudder of the consequences that must inevitably have fallen on us if the stoker's delirium had taken another turn, or if the surgeon of the hospital had looked upon it merely as the baseless raving of a diseased mind.

Jerome Parkes.

THE QUEEN of NIGHT

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BY HEADON HILL,
(*Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," "The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.*)

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. BRINKWORTH'S NARRATIVE.

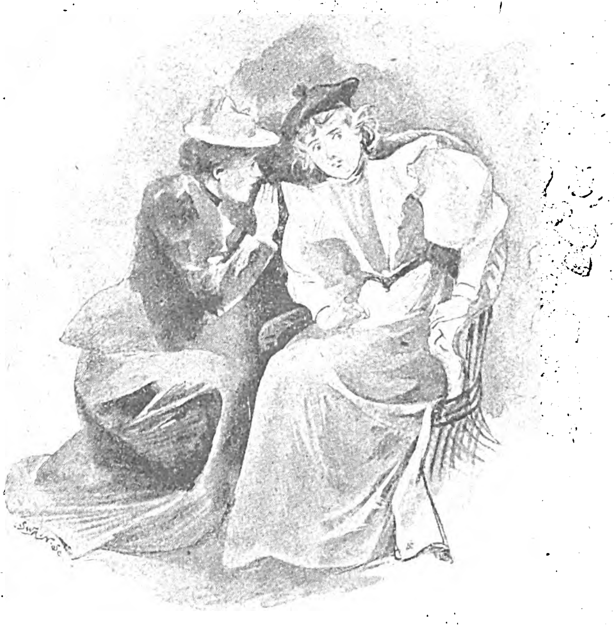
AT the request of my friend, Captain Cyril Forrester, late of the Merchant Service, I take up my pen to fill a gap in the statement which he is preparing for press about that awful voyage in the *Queen of Night*. Certain things, very relative to the end now so fast approaching, occurred during his absence from the ship, and also while he was so wickedly confined after his rescue from the spar; and it is of these matters, of which he was necessarily not an eye-witness, that he has asked me to write.

When the ship left Genoa none of the passengers knew that Captain Forrester had been left behind, and that Mr. McIntyre had superseded him in the command by cabled instructions from the owners at home. Still less were they made aware of the supposed reason. It was only when we were well out to sea, and there was no fear of anyone on board going ashore to the Captain's assistance, that Doctor Zavertal allowed the facts to leak out; and in such a hurry was he to get away that, at his instigation, Mr. McIntyre would not wait a quarter of an hour for the passenger then known as General Waldo, who had gone ashore secretly the previous day and had not returned.

Zavertal took care to lie circumstantially, so that the story he told could be corroborated. He informed the group of passengers selected for the purpose that he had discovered early in the voyage that "poor Forrester" suffered from delusions, though he had hoped that they would not interfere with his proper working of the ship.

The malady, however, had developed so quickly that when the Captain turned a gentleman out of the ship on the absurd ground that he was a stowaway who had been landed at Barcelona—also by a strange and sudden freak of his own—there was only one course to pursue. His, Zavertal's, responsibility as medical officer made it imperative that he should consult the British Consul, the result being that the unfortunate Captain was being taken care of till arrangements could be made for his return to England.

The news of Captain Forrester's detention soon spread through the ship, but luckily I was able to forestall rumour, and break it to my dear young charge, Miss Challenor, myself. Aline had confided their engagement to me, and, if for no other reason, they had earned my sympathy and gratitude by their unceasing kindness towards me during my terrible ordeal at Gibraltar.

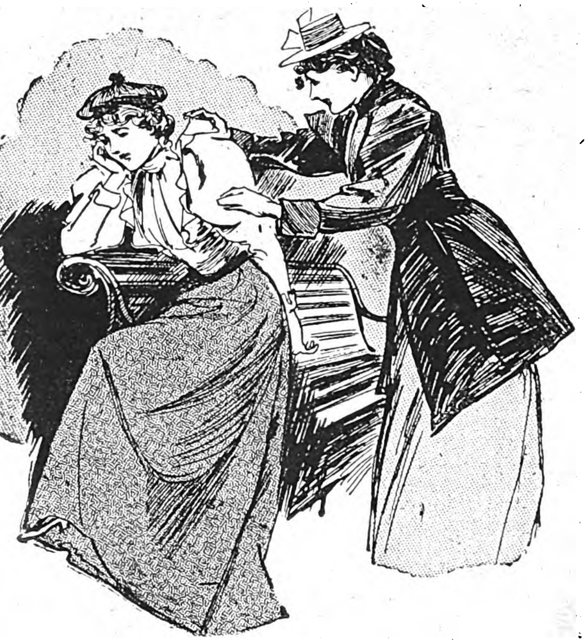


Luckily I was able to forestall rumour.

To my great relief Aline looked upon the Doctor's allegation as so utterly ridiculous that she did not take it to heart so much as I had feared, her chief feeling being one of indignation that her lover should be temporarily subjected to such treatment at the instance of a man she already disliked. In her ignorance of ulterior motives, she was confident that an hour or two would suffice for Captain Forrester to convince the authorities of the mistake that had been made, and she quite expected that he would appear at Naples to put Zavertal to confusion.

This hope was destined to be quickly shattered. At breakfast the next morning, Mr. McIntyre announced that owing to the prevalence of cholera at Naples, the *Queen of Night* would have to abandon her visit to that port, but would touch at Leghorn instead. The reason given—we know now that none such existed—was quite strong enough to stop any general grumbling at the change, but to Aline it was a terrible blow. From Leghorn the ship would go to Alexandria, possibly calling at Cagliari in Sardinia *en route*, we were told, but in any case offering no opportunity for Captain Forrester to rejoin her.

It must not be supposed that the passengers allowed Captain Forrester's deposition to pass without a good deal of sympathetic comment. He had become a great favourite with all, and Doctor Zavertal required all his own established popularity to justify the course he had taken. But he was equal to the occasion, and by hints and innuendos managed to hold his own. An especially strong point with him was that Captain Forrester had prevented him from going ashore at Barcelona, when he wished to procure a certain drug to cure old Lady Carberry's neuralgia. This carried weight with the tuft-hunters, of whom there were not a few on the pleasure-cruiser.



This hope was destined to be quickly shattered.

At Leghorn two incidents worthy of note occurred. We arrived off the port shortly after breakfast, and many of the passengers were preparing to land when the Doctor came into the saloon and announced that before any shore parties left the ship it had been decided that he should go and see if the town had a clean bill of health, as if it were infected we might be subjected to the annoyance of quarantine at other Mediterranean ports.

He came back in a couple of hours' time with the news that several cases of cholera had occurred, and advised that, though it might not be dangerous to land, it would be wiser in view of possible future restrictions to give the place a wide berth. It has since been proved that cholera had not been heard of at Leghorn that year.

The second item calling for remark was the return of "General Waldo"—the passenger who had been left behind at Genoa. A few minutes after Zavertal came aboard I was on deck, trying to comfort Aline, who was terribly downcast at the prospect of leaving Italy without further news of her lover. The anchor was being got up, and all was ready for the start, when I heard someone say: "Why, here comes old Waldo; he has caught us up after all."

Looking up, I saw a shore boat rapidly approaching the ship, and sure enough the fare was the eccentric American tourist, whose loss everyone had been regretting. The fact of his reappearance soon spread, and the steamer's side was quickly thronged with passengers, eager to welcome him back. Zavertal was standing by when he came up the ladder, and greeted him warmly, though with some surprise.

"Why, General, this is delightful," he said in his most genial manner. "We had quite given you up for good. What on earth have you been up to, and how came you to be smart enough to pick us up?"

"Easy as falling off a log," was the characteristically quaint reply. "I got fooling round among the stores at Genoa, missed you by ten minutes, and came on by the cars, after learning your change of destination from your agent, who was still on the quay when I came up."

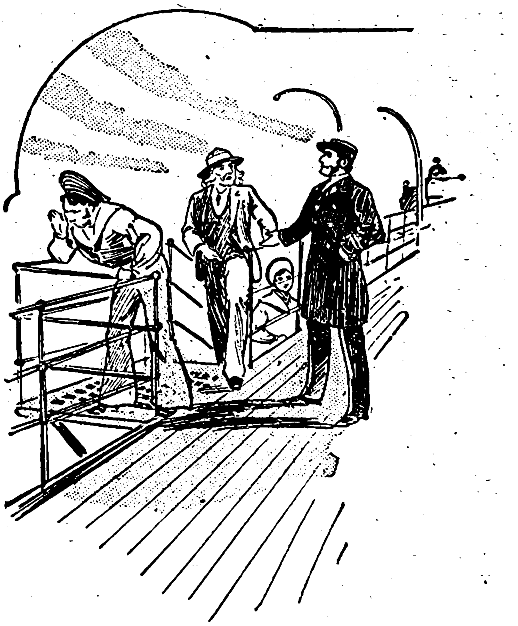
"Well, we're all glad to see you," said the Doctor. "By the way, there is a bit of news which I fear will distress you. We have been obliged to leave poor Captain Forrester behind—a little wrong here, you know"—tapping his forehead.

"You don't say!" exclaimed Waldo. "That is bad hearing certainly; but, come to think of it, I guess I'm not altogether astonished. The skipper's talk has been powerful wild of late."

Zavertal must have been pleased indeed to find that one who had been so specially friendly with Captain Forrester was yet willing to confirm and approve his action. Taking Waldo by the arm, he walked him off for a confidential talk, and during the next day or two I noticed that he was almost obsequiously attentive to the strange American. Fortunately Aline was too preoccupied either to care about Waldo's return or to heed his conversation; but what I heard filled me with an intense disgust, which I showed later in the day by treating him with marked coolness, Zavertal being present at the time. Thence onward, so long as I knew him as "General Waldo," our relations were decidedly "strained."

On leaving Leghorn the passengers were informed that it had been decided to visit Cagliari, but first to skirt the Italian coast as far as Civita Vecchia, so that as far as possible the original programme, less the call at Naples, might be preserved.

On the evening of the day after we left Leghorn, while Aline was resting in the state-room, I was sitting alone on deck when General Waldo passed me. Up to the last day or two we should have interchanged bows and smiles, and very likely he would have made some quaint remark; but now he looked straight to his front, and I pretended to



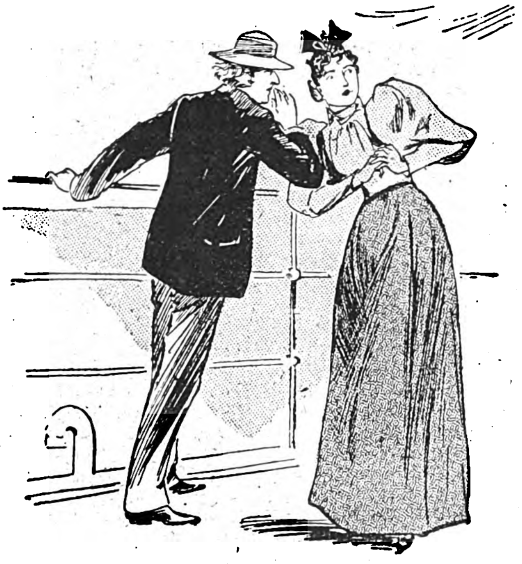
"Why, General, this is delightful."

admire the sunset. He walked aft to the stern, and disappeared behind the wheel-house.

A minute or so after he had gone by I chanced to look down at my lap, and to my surprise saw there a crumpled slip of paper which had certainly not long been there. Opening it out, I was astonished to read:

"Follow me to wheel-house. A few words of vital importance to Miss Challenor."

The American had tossed the missive there so adroitly that the motion had escaped me. For a moment I was in doubt as to what I ought to do. His callousness about Captain Forrester's trouble hardly tallied with a desire to serve Aline, for every one on the ship had by this time guessed how matters were between them, nor could I see how it was in his power to be of use. But reflecting that to hear what he had to say would in no way bind me to accept his services, and perhaps impelled by feminine curiosity, I rose and walked aft.



He came close to me.

The manner of his communicating with me implied a wish for secrecy, and I therefore took care to be unobserved when I slipped behind the wheel-house. Waldo was leaning over the stern-rail, watching the foaming track of the screw, but directly I rounded the corner he was at my side, with a quick, gliding motion that was quite novel to the supposed aged veteran. As soon as he opened his mouth to speak, I knew that he had been either acting a part before or was doing so now, for the firm grave tones that fell upon my ears were those of a man in the prime of life.

"You have done well to come," he said. "And first of all, let me correct a wrong impression. Captain Forrester has no stauncher friend than myself on this ship. I spoke as I did the other day in your hearing for several reasons, the chief of them being that I wished to incur your temporary enmity."

"I was grieved beyond measure to hear you speak so hardly and untruthfully of one who had been your intimate," I replied. "You could not have chosen a better way to effect your purpose, though I do not understand why you should have wished to make me think badly of you."

He came close to me and said impressively, though scarcely above a whisper: "Because it is a matter of life or death to your fair young charge that Doctor Zavertal should believe us to be at daggers drawn, Mrs. Brinkworth. You and I have to stand between that poor girl and a horrible end, and a secret alliance, while we ostensibly remain hostile, will help us to combat—successfully, I believe—a treacherous and insidious foe."

And then rapidly, but very clearly and concisely, he told me much that the reader has already learned from Captain Forrester's narrative—his knowledge of Zavertal's past career, his suspicions of intended foul play, and the development of doubt into certainty through what he had heard and seen at Genoa. He concluded the shocking story by describing the interrupted attempt on the Captain's life at Pisa, and told how he himself shadowed Vizard to Leghorn—to lose him there, however, shortly after he had resumed his original character of "Waldo." He had no doubt that Vizard, after conferring with Zavertal, had gone south after Captain Forrester; but loth as he was to leave the Captain unprotected, he, Mr. Kennard, had thought his own services most needed on the ship, and had consequently come aboard.

"You must not be frightened," he added, seeing that I trembled violently. "Forewarned is forearmed, and if you will only lend me your assistance I think that we shall be able to beat the gang with their own weapons. You see my object is to get absolute proof on the capital charge, and so scotch them once for all. If I were to denounce them on mere suspicion I might spoil this particular scheme of their villainy, but it is very doubtful as things are if I could get a conviction, and they would be certain to commence operations again in some new form."

"Tell me how I can help," I replied; "if there is anything that a woman can do I will do it for Aline's sake—even at the risk of my life."

"At present I foresee no personal risk to you, but in dealing with such criminals—soon, I trust, to become desperate—it is necessary to be prepared," he answered gravely. "Briefly, I want you to aid me in furnishing Zavertal with the opportunity he desires of prescribing for Miss Challenor. She must either be induced to feign illness, of course, after having been told the reason; or we must give her something to bring on symptoms without doing her the slightest harm. You know her best; which shall it be? For myself I should recommend it being managed without her knowledge, as Zavertal might discover that her malady was pretended, and achieve his purpose in some other way—without tampering with her medicine."

The idea of secret drugging, however skilfully and harmlessly it might be done, was repugnant to me, and I told Mr. Kennard what I thought. I knew that the dear girl's brave spirit would enable her to play her part perfectly, especially as it was to bring confusion on the wretch who had ill-treated her lover.

"Very well, have it your way," was the reply. "We will lay the trap to-morrow. Meet me here after breakfast for final arrangements while Zavertal is inspecting the crew. Good-night, and courage."

He vanished round the corner of the wheelhouse, and after waiting a few minutes I, too, went out on to the deck, dazed and horror-struck by what I had heard, but determined to be worthy of the trust reposed in me.

During the ensuing night it will be remembered that first Vizard and then Captain Forrester were picked up, and the latter will resume his pen to relate the complications that resulted.

CHAPTER XXI.

DR. ZAVERTAL LOSES A PATIENT.

(Captain Forrester's Narrative Continued.)

THE horror of hearing that Aline was ill, and that Zavertal had been called in to attend her, left me for a minute stunned and helpless; but the shutting and locking of the surgery door, followed by the sound of a receding footstep, roused me to action. The doctor was already starting to visit his patient.

I sprang to the door of my cabin, only to find it locked; but one of the sailors on guard opened it in answer to my appeal, standing in the entrance so as to block all possible exit. From behind him the black-bearded face of his mate peered at me, and I saw that two of the most powerful seamen in the crew had been selected for the post of gaolers to their late Captain. To make a rush for freedom could only end in discomfiture.

"See here, my men; there's a hundred pounds a-piece for you if you'll just forget to mind that doorway for a minute," I said. "And I will guarantee that you shall never know what it is to want a good berth again."

The foremost man made a wry face and gave a sea-scrape. "Very sorry, Captain," he said. "We might think of it if so be it was going to do you any good. But what 'ud be the use on it? You'd be collared and brought back afore you'd got half the length of the ship."

There was a good deal of rude sense in his way of looking at it. But I felt that at all hazards I must warn Mrs. Brinkworth against allowing Zavertal access to Aline, and accordingly altered my tactics.

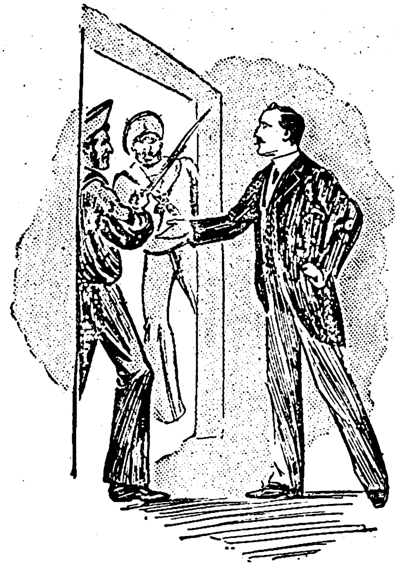
"Would you take a note for me—to one of the lady passengers?" I asked.

The man turned to whisper to his mate, but before they had come to any conclusion Kennard pushed his way past them into the cabin, and in his character of a privileged visitor shut the door in their faces.

"It's all right," he said, seeing that I was about to fire up again. "You ought to have trusted me sufficiently, Forrester, to know that I was only kidding when I was here an hour ago. There was a very good reason. Zavertal was watching us, and listening to every word that passed, from the surgery—just as I believe he took stock of you in Nathan's office through the Black Sea chart on the day they engaged you. I am not in the habit of selling my friends."

"You do well to blame me," I said, overjoyed at the discovery of my mistake. "But you must remember what tortures of suspense I am undergoing, and forgive me. Why even now that villain has gone below to his deadly work."

"It is of that that I come to tell you," he said. "Miss Challenor is a brave and willing patient in his hands, with a full knowledge of his designs." And he went on to describe the trap that he and Mrs. Brinkworth had laid, and to assure me that nothing would pass Aline's lips that could possibly harm her.

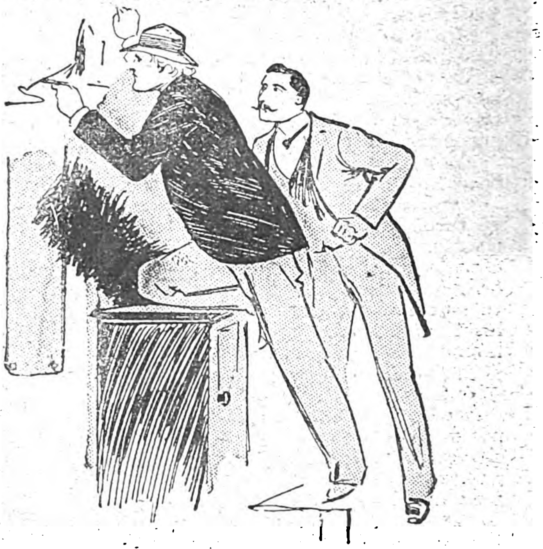


"See here, my men; there's a hundred pounds a-piece for you."

"All I want is to get a sample of the Doctor's medicine for analysis, and then my case against him and Vizard will be complete," he said. "I am a fairly good chemist, and as soon as my tests have found poison, I shall go to McIntyre and lay the facts before him. Unless he wants to risk being tried as an accessory, he will have those two put under lock and key, and start for home with them, without more ado. And now, what really happened on the *Miranda*? So far I only have Vizard's version, you know."

I shortly recounted what had befallen, since parting with him at Pisa, not forgetting to mention Vizard's triumphant assertion that he, Kennard, had been killed by him at Leghorn. He listened intently to the end, and then said:

"He left the *Miranda* in the company of the Italian engineer, you say. He was alone in the boat when picked up, which looks very much as if he had two murders to account for during the last three days. He must have taken a short way of destroying evidence. I think, too, I can explain his supposition that he had put me under the sand. After changing back into my Waldo get-up I gave the clothes in which he saw me in the train to a loafer on the beach. The poor beggar must have put them on and paid for them with his life. I chose him for the gift because he was about my height and build. But hush—not a word—there is Zavertal back at the surgery."



He gently inserted the blade in one of the holes.

The sound of the next door being unlocked, opened, and relocked reached us, and at the same moment Kennard glided across the cabin to the partition-wall. Running his hand deftly over the panelling, he stopped at a piece of carved fret-work over the wash-stand, examined it closely, and then taking a penknife from his pocket gently inserted the blade in one of the holes, to which at the same time he applied his eye.

After a long gaze, apparently into the thickness of the partition, he turned, and with a finger on his lips, beckoned me to join him. Still keeping his knife in the hole in the fret-work, he motioned me to place my eye where his had been, and I immediately saw that the ornament simply covered an aperture into the surgery, its function being concealed from any occupant of my cabin by a piece of cloth, the colour of the panels, which Kennard had raised slightly with his knife. Zavertal was standing at the dispensary shelf, with his back to us, manipulating the bottles.

Kennard only allowed me a peep, and then drawing me aside resumed his place at the hole—watching intently for fully five minutes. At the end of that time he suddenly withdrew the knife, allowing the cloth veil to fall into position, and remained perfectly still. Listening breathlessly, we heard Zavertal move across the surgery and go out, taking his usual precaution of locking the door behind him. His footsteps died away in the direction of the companion-stairs.

"He has gone below with the medicine," said Kennard "but he will not incur suspicion by personally administering it. Should he try to do so Mrs. Brinkworth has her instructions and is quite equal to the occasion."

"Aline—Miss Challenor—is not still feigning unconsciousness?" I asked, for the idea of my sweet girl being subjected to all this was horrible to me.

"Oh dear, no," replied Kennard; "that would have been trying her too much. She partially 'recovered' before Zavertal's first visit, but she cleverly managed to look quite ill enough for the purpose."

"Does she know that I am on board?"

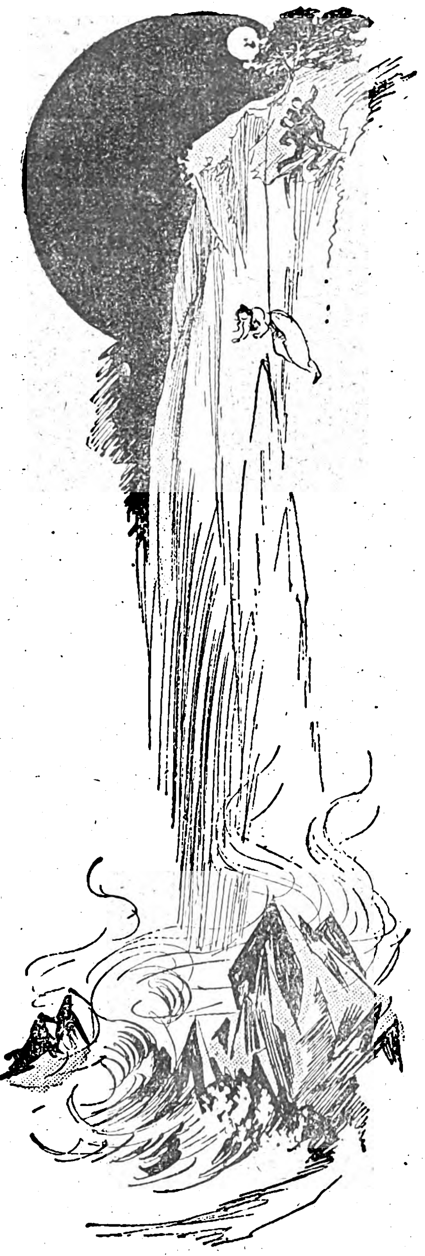
"Yes, the news of your being picked up furnished an excellent excuse for the faint," said Kennard. "I have no doubt that Zavertal, having an opportunity ready made for him, will reverse the intended programme and devote his fiendish cunning to her case before taking on Lord Darranmore's—and yours, which he most certainly means shall follow. The villains would never rest till you are as dead as I am supposed to be; for then, with the exception of the man Dicey, they would be free, or believe themselves to be free, from all sources of accusation."

"They will probably settle Dicey, too," said I, thinking of the disappearance of the *Miranda's* engineer.

"That is quite on the cards," replied Kennard, "and I am keeping an anxious watch for his return to sense. The delirium is already abating, and as soon as possible I shall try and frighten him into rounding on his employers. Now that Zavertal believes, from his observations through that fret-work, that "Waldo" is obnoxious to you, I can come and go anywhere on the ship without incurring suspicion. After what passed this morning, though, I must not negative that impression by visiting you too frequently. Expect me when I have definite news, and in the meanwhile don't be afraid of your food. They won't have two 'cases' on hand at once."

Gripping me by the hand, which was more than I deserved after my mistrust, he slipped out of the cabin and I was left alone to my thoughts. They were brighter far than any I had had for days; for though anxiety would last till those two fiends were openly accused, I could not help feeling confident that Kennard would beat them now. And yet, so long as there remained the possibility of a hitch in the arrangements—of some fiendish trickery which should baffle Mrs. Brinkworth's watchfulness and the detective's foresight—my mind could not but be in a turmoil of impatience and dread.

After a midday meal, which was served to me, as my breakfast had been, by one of the door-keepers, I fell asleep, utterly wearied and worn out by the experience of the previous night. For some time my brain enjoyed a respite of perfect oblivion, but after a while I began to dream, and a vision of strange scenery and fantastic shapes formed before my sightless eyes.



A vision of strange scenery and fantastic shapes.

Gradually, out of the blackness, there grew the outline of a gigantic precipice, running sheer down to a boiling sea, studded with jagged fangs of rock. On the top of the cliff, bent inland by the force of a thousand gales, stood a solitary tree, and a few feet from its base two men were locked together in deadly struggle, their bodies swaying hither and thither, on the brink of the abyss.

As the vision grew clearer I saw that round the tree-trunk was made fast a rope, one end of which dangled fifty feet down the side of the cliff, supporting the form of a woman. All at once a blood-red moon appeared in the sky, and shed a lurid light on the struggling men, showing me the faces of Zavertal and Kennard. Even as I looked Zavertal seemed to prevail, and shaking Kennard free hurled him over the precipice. Then, as he sprang knife in hand towards the straining rope, I recognised in the dangling figure—Aline.

I awoke with a cry of horror on my lips to find McIntyre standing over me, a gravely sympathetic expression on his rugged Scotch face.

"I roused you too roughly," he said in a kindly tone. "I'm not thinking that you bear malice over this affair, so I just looked in to do you a turn unbeknown to anybody. You have mayhap heard that the young lady, Miss Challenor, is ill?"

McIntyre was right in supposing that I felt no resentment against him for his involuntary usurpation. And he was ten years older than myself, a married man and the father of a family, so that I could accept from him as friendly interest what I might have regarded as an impertinent suggestion from another.

"Yes," I replied; "I have heard of it. Is she worse?"

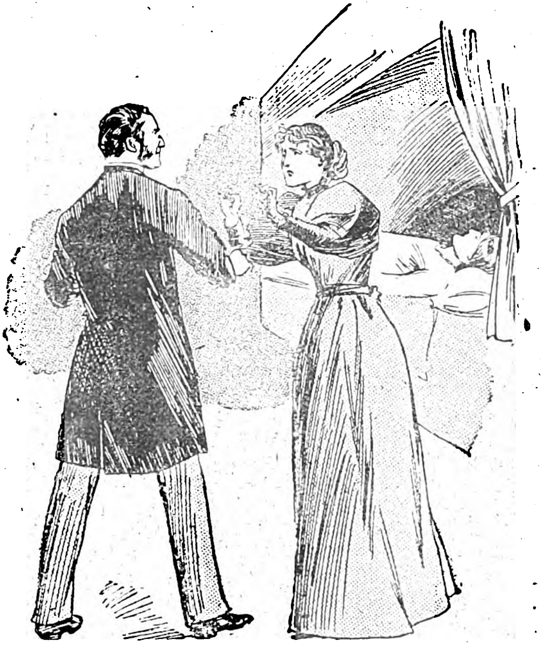
"It's just that that brings me," he said with increased solemnity. "Every one on the ship knows you were sweethearts, and I was thinking it's not fair for you not to see her and she so sick. So come along with me and I'll take you to her."

Greatly agitated, I rose to follow him; though, as the good fellow was clearly acting on his own responsibility and in ignorance of the ruse that was being played, I could not believe that there was real cause for alarm. Still, the awful chance that vigilance had been eluded by professional cunning was ever present, and as I passed out of the cabin with my conductor I braced myself for what in any case must be an ordeal.

That McIntyre was not yet in Kennard's confidence and still thought me mad was proved by the fact that the two seamen followed us at a respectful distance, doubtless by his instructions. There were no passengers about, and the clock on the companion-stairs furnished the reason by proclaiming that it was the saloon dinner-hour. At the foot of the stairs we turned aft into the corridor, and here again there was no one to be seen. Only from the open door of number seventeen state-room came the sound of a woman's weeping.

"I fear she is worse," said McIntyre, hastening his steps.

But the sound of crying was too much for me, and springing past him I rushed to the state-room door. Aline lay in her berth, her features serenely calm in waxen whiteness, while Mrs. Brinkworth was endeavouring hysterically to prevent Zavertal from approaching the bed.



Mrs. Brinkworth was endeavouring hysterically to prevent Zavertal from approaching the bed.

"You shall not touch her," she cried frantically. "My darling girl is dead, and no hands but mine shall tend her. Go away, I say, and leave me to close her eyes."

"It is usual for the Doctor to verify a decease, but I can see that there is no room for doubt in this case," Zavertal replied. "I leave you, madam, with my deepest sympathy."

Then he turned to come away and saw me. His hand went to his breast-pocket, but I was too quick for him, and clutching his collar I dragged him from that sacred presence to pin him by the throat to the corridor wall outside with fingers keen to strangle. As I gazed into his fast-purpling face all the agony of knowing that he had prevailed broke from me in one hissed word:

"*Murderer!*"

(*To be concluded.*)

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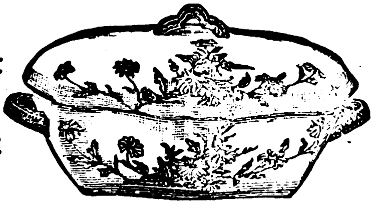

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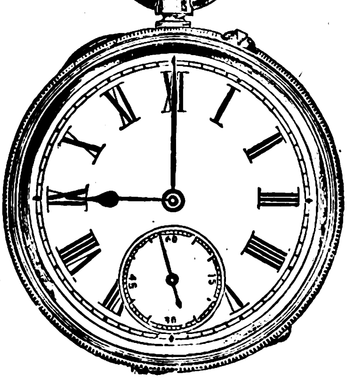

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Gentlemen,—Received to-day your second parcel of jewellery, with which we are immensely pleased. We really wonder how you can do it. The watch itself is worth more than the money charged for the whole. Many thanks for punctuality.—Very truly yours, WILLIAM McISAAC.

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EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 361. FOR WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 30TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

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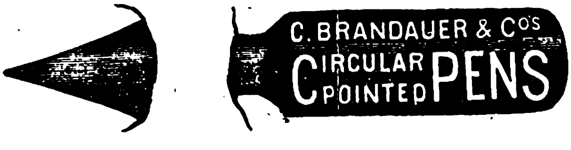

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Inventors and Manufacturers:

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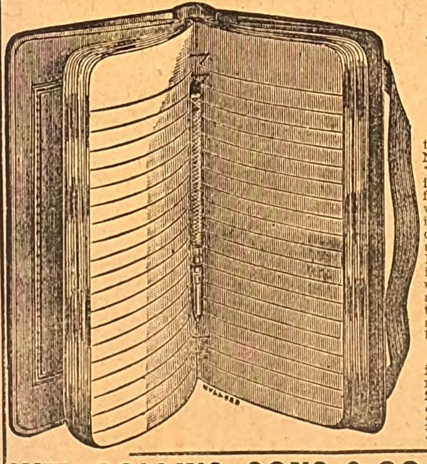

THE HANDIEST AND THE BEST. THE SIMPLEST AND THE CHEAPEST.

As will be seen from the Illustration, this Note-Book has a hollow "rest" cut into the back, into which the Pencil falls and is securely held, while by means of an ingenious contrivance called a "Self-Register," the person using the Book can at once open it where he was last writing. A reference to any page in the front, the middle, or the end is also materially assisted by the "Self-Register."

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Romance
War
Love
Humour
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Poetry
Robt. A. Shield 1895
R.A.S.
Edited by C. Arthur Pearson.

No. 361. [One Penny.

For the Week ending November 30th, 1895.

A Mysterious - - - - Disappearance.

"STRANGE delusions, you say. Yes, as is often the case, many of the patients under my charge"—the speaker was an old friend of mine, and the principal medical officer in a large asylum—"are absolutely sane on all except one particular subject. You yourself must have noticed that during the conversazione this evening, for I saw you talking to old Symons, who is as sane as you or I, except that he believes himself the rightful heir to the throne of England.

"He will converse rationally on any subject under the sun, and he's a remarkably well-informed man, but once mention Royalty, and he is immediately and unmistakably insane.

"I could tell you some extraordinary stories of patients I have had under my charge since I have been here, but none probably so strange as that of the case of a young fellow—now an eminent scientist of very high reputation—who, for a time, had one of the most extraordinary delusions which ever occurred to a man, and what is more, even now, after a lapse of over fifteen years, he is as firmly as ever convinced of its absolute reality.

"I was at the time surgeon to the police in the Fulham Division, and it was in this way that I became acquainted, professionally, with the case I am about to describe.

"Fulham was, at the time, much less thickly populated than it is now, and in one particular street there was an old-fashioned, but sadly dilapidated, house of considerable size, which had evidently at one time been a residence of much importance; but it had come upon evil days, and, having been tenantless for upwards of twenty years, had fallen into decay. It was even hinted by persons living in the locality that there was something uncanny about it.

"The officer, who summoned me to attend without delay, told me as he went along that at about eleven o'clock that morning the constable on duty near the old house in question had his attention attracted by the action of the young man I was about to see, who I will call Arthur Davis, which, I need hardly say, is not his real name.

"He was knocking with his fists at the heavy nail-studded, worm-eaten door, and frantically calling out the word 'Marie.' At first the policeman had endeavoured to get him to desist, and go away quietly, but instead of doing so he became more and more excited, until at last the policeman had no alternative but to forcibly remove him to the police-station, where the inspector in charge, not knowing exactly how to deal with the case himself, had very wisely given instructions that I should be sent for.

"In reply to my inquiries, as I went along, I elicited that the individual in question was a smart, gentlemanly,

All rights reserved.]

and evidently intelligent young fellow, apparently about twenty years of age, and well-dressed. In fact he appeared to have taken extra care with his get up on the particular occasion in question, being attired—so my informant stated—in a well-fitting blue frock coat, with a white button hole, lavender tie, and gloves to match, and light coloured trousers.

"'Going to be best man at a wedding, perhaps?' I remarked laughingly.

"'No, sir, he was to have been married this morning,' he said; 'and that's all we can get out of him.'

"'Had he been drinking, do you think?'

"'No, sir, he is perfectly sober, but seems to be labouring under very great excitement; he was trembling all over when I last saw him.'

"'Ah,' I thought to myself, 'a case of over-study, probably.'

"A few minutes later found me in the private room at the police-station set apart for my special use.

"The inspector, a good-natured fellow who had been spoilt by red tapeism, had been considerate enough to allow Mr. Arthur Davis to take a seat there, pending my arrival, and when I came in suggested that he should retire and leave me alone with Mr. Davis, who was, I could see, in a high state of feverish excitement.

"My first object was to restore his mental equilibrium, as far as possible; and after a minute or two he had become sufficiently calm to express a desire to tell me his story, which I cordially agreed to; and he did so, as near as I can remember, in the following words:

"'I am a student of chemistry,' he said, 'and am employed by a large firm of chemical manufacturers. Some months ago my firm received an order from a customer, giving an address at —— Street, for a very peculiar class of goods, so unusual, in fact, that it was anticipated there would be considerable difficulty in supplying them, and I was instructed to call at the address given with a view to seeing if the order had been taken correctly, or if it would admit of any modification.

"'I had not much difficulty in finding the street named, and also the house, which was old-fashioned, and differed from those on either side both in size and style of architecture.

"'I knocked twice before anyone came, and then the door was carefully opened a few inches, by a queer, wizened-looking old man, who asked suspiciously what it was I wanted; for reply, I handed him my credentials, a card of my firm, which I had taken the precaution to have with me.

"'The old fellow's face lightened up at once, and after undoing several bolts and a chain, opened the door wide, and asked me to come in. Having done so, he carefully closed it again, and then preceded me into a good-sized room on the ground floor, fitted up as a laboratory.

"'It contained a furnace such as mineralogists use; and, in one corner, a glass bowl was standing over a gas jet, containing a curious liquid which was bubbling away at a great rate. I was particular in noticing these things, thinking they might afford some clue as to the reason of the unusual order we had received.

"'In the course of a brief conversation, during which I gathered that our new customer was engaged in a series of chemical experiments, I learnt enough of his objects to be extremely interested in their subsequent development, and promised to return myself with the particular compound he wished for, instead of sending it by a messenger.

"'He was evidently much delighted at the interest I evinced, and just as I was going away, called out to his daughter, Marie, one of the most beautiful girls I had ever seen, I thought, to tell her that he had at last succeeded in obtaining what he had so long been in want of, and that I had promised to deliver it in the course of the day.

"'"I am so glad, papa," was her reply; spoken in a soft musical tone which seemed to thrill me to the heart

"'I may pass over briefly what followed; suffice it to say that in me the old gentleman found a willing assistant in his experiments, and much of my spare time was passed in his laboratory.

"'Ah,' he exclaimed excitedly, 'I see you guess my secret. We fell in love with each other; who could help it? And one day I ventured to ask his permission to marry Marie.

"'His reply was not encouraging: "Tut, tut, Marie is only a child, not old enough to think of such things; and now about the action of this acid," referring to an experiment we were engaged upon at the time, as if the matter of my love for Marie was not worthy of further consideration.

"'When I told her, later on, how he had received my proposal, she did not, as I expected, appear dejected, but, on the contrary, told me to be patient, and that she knew she could obtain her father's consent. This she eventually did, and the day was at length fixed for our marriage.'

"He paused; and, with a view to encouraging him, I asked him when was it to be?

"'Good gracious! don't you understand? To-day. We were to be married to-day. We were to be married this morning, and now—I shall go mad, I think!'

"'Try and compose yourself so as to continue your story,' I said. 'You left off at the point where the old gentleman had given his consent to your union with his daughter.'

"'Yes, yes, but I ought to have told you more about him. Although the house they lived in was large enough to accommodate a big family and three or four servants, I soon discovered that they only occupied a portion of it—a bedroom each, the laboratory I have already mentioned, and one sitting-room (her room he called it), where we all three used to sit for hours at times when her father had no particular experiment to be worked out.

"'There was no one else in the house—no servant—but a woman used to come in for a few hours daily.

"'When her father had once given his consent to our union, the subject seemed to have entirely escaped his memory until a few days ago, when, on our telling him the day fixed for our marriage he gave Marie a most beautiful Indian scarf, which he said he wished her to wear on her wedding day.

"'The texture was of finest gossamer web, and had apparently been constructed from some mineral substance, as it had the most brilliant sheen of various colours I ever saw, and although so light that a puff of wind would have blown it away, yet, when Marie put it on over her white dress (the one she was to be married in), it seemed to effectually envelop her in a soft clinging embrace.

"'When she had it on this morning—yes, this morning!' he said excitedly, 'she looked like an angel. We all three had breakfast together, her father making the coffee, and in honour of the occasion we had a bottle of wine, very sweet, and it was effervescing, I remember.

"'Breakfast over, Marie went to her room to dress herself. We were to be married at eleven o'clock quite quietly, and her father confided to me that he had, he thought, at last discovered a secret to fathom which he had been engaged in experimenting upon for some years past, and that when Marie and I returned from our honeymoon and took up our abode with him (we were only going to be away a fortnight), he hoped to be able to take me into his confidence.

"'He was going to give me some further details when Marie re-appeared, dressed in a white gown, with the Indian scarf over it. The rays of the summer sun, shining in at the begrimed window, fell immediately upon her where she stood, and she looked the incarnation of female loveliness.

"'Just then the carriage that was to take us to the church drew up outside the door, and we all three went downstairs, her father first, then Marie, and I bringing up the rear. Her father took his seat with his back to the horses.

"'I assisted Marie to get in, and was just entering the carriage myself, when, in a tone of affright, she exclaimed: "My bracelet, I have forgotten it, and I must have it. I left it in the laboratory last night, I remember." And before I could stop her she was gone.

"'I stood on the doorstep awaiting her return; the old man remained seated in the brougham apparently lost in thought. After what seemed an interminable time—I dare say it was not more than a few minutes—as she had not come back, I followed her. I have some idea that her father called out to me; but if he did I did not hear what he said.

"'The laboratory was, as I think I told you, an isolated room at the back of the house on the ground floor, and to reach it I had to pass through a long passage. As I made my way along it I became aware of a strange odour, unlike anything I had ever before experienced, which seemed to be gradually overpowering me. I fought against its seductive influence, however, and presently found myself at the door of the laboratory.

"'On opening it I was almost overwhelmed with the sight of a strange mist, accompanied by the odour I had already noticed, and standing in the middle of the room, only the outline of her figure being discernible, I saw my Marie. She was swaying to and fro as if in a state of utter helplessness, and, as I rushed forward to clasp her in my arms, I distinctly heard her whisper, as if in tearful agony: "Farewell, darling; 'tis best so."

"'Suddenly where she had been standing was nothing but mist, and I sought for her in vain. I uttered a cry of despair, and instantly the mist cleared away, and a single glance served to show that the room and its surroundings were exactly as I had last seen them. But on the floor immediately where I had just seen Marie standing was a small glittering heap being all that remained of that accursed Indian scarf.

"'That is my story, sir, I know no more; remember nothing further than being forcibly brought here by a policeman who found me endeavouring to obtain admittance at the house where I last saw her.'

"'Do you know the police say they saw no carriage, and the house where they found you has not been occupied for over twenty years?'

"For reply he only shook his head: 'I have told you the truth,' he added quietly, all symptoms of excitement having left him with the conclusion of his strange story. His emotion was succeeded by a display of extreme nervous sensibility, as evidenced by a violent trembling, the results of which might, I knew, prove very serious.

"The great thing was to keep him as quiet as possible, and I prevailed upon the good-natured inspector to allow me, as no charge had been recorded, to take him to my house; which I did, and gave him an opiate, hoping that on his awakening the delusion might have faded from his memory."

"And did it?" I asked.

"He is as convinced of its reality to-day as he was then," was the doctor's emphatic reply. "The strange thing is I made it my duty to at once go and see his employers, and they showed me an order duly signed, but bearing neither date nor address, and written in a cramped foreign hand, requesting to be served with the very compounds Mr. Davis declared he had supplied to the old gentleman, and which, as it has since transpired, are of invaluable use in connection with certain mineralogical experiments.

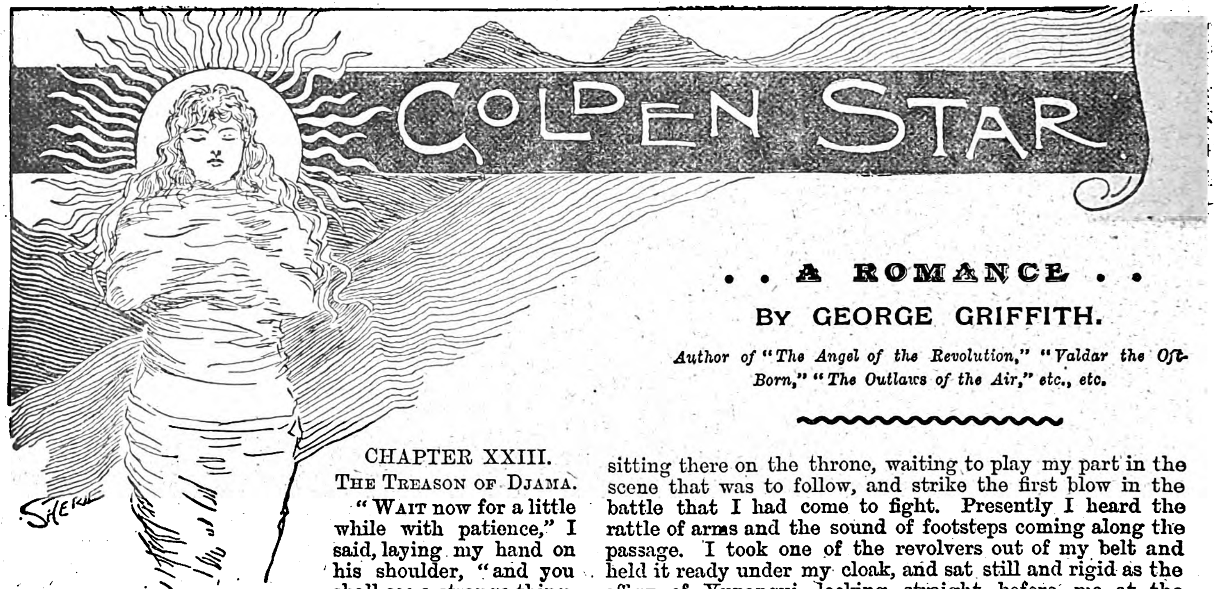
"My next move was, as you may suppose, to try and find out the house named. To find the street was easy enough, but there was not a house in it in any way answering to the description given, and the place where the policeman found the young fellow hammering away and incoherently calling out to Marie, was more than a mile distant.

"It is, I suppose, needless for me to say that not the slightest trace has ever been forthcoming of the lady or her father.

"For a long time Davis was under my care, in a very critical condition; but he finally recovered, and, far from being out of his mind, is, as I told you, now regarded—and not without reason—as one of the most clever scientists of the day.

"And what is my opinion? I confess I am unable to give one, but when you asked me if many of my insane patients have extraordinary delusions, it occurred to me to narrate the case of an absolutely sane person who was once similarly affected; that is the only explanation I can offer."

Peter Parr.



. . A ROMANCE . .

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TREASON OF DJAMA.

"WAIT now for a little while with patience," I said, laying my hand on his shoulder, "and you shall see a strange thing, a thing that shall show you how strong are still the old traditions in the land of the Incas. Lie here and do not let yourself be seen till I send a messenger for you. It will not be very long."

He nodded and I rose quietly to my feet and went round the hollow in which the Sayacusca stands until I got the great stone between me and the place where the soldiers were standing, and then I went down on my hands and knees and crept quietly towards it and climbed up a flight of steps carved in it. This took me to the top of the cleft in which is the broken stairway. I climbed down this and dropped softly into the hole at the bottom. It was dry now, for Tupac had done that which I had bidden him in the throne-room. I felt my way down the steps till I came to the wall at the bottom. Then I whispered his name and he answered out of the darkness in the old language:

"I am here, Lord, and all that has been ordered is done."

I crept towards him along the wall, measuring my way along it with my outstretched arms till I knew that I had come to the revolving stone which closed the way into the hall. He was standing against it and one of the others was with him. I felt over the door till I found the silver socket, and then we opened the door as before with the bar, which Tupac had brought. Then I went down through the hall and lighted a lantern and went into the little chamber where, as before, I changed my clothing for the Imperial robes, and set the Llautu on my head, but I kept on my belt under my cloak and put two revolvers in it in case I should need them, and when I went back into the hall Tupac and the others were lighting candles and putting them in the holders round the walls as I had bidden them. When this was done I said to him:

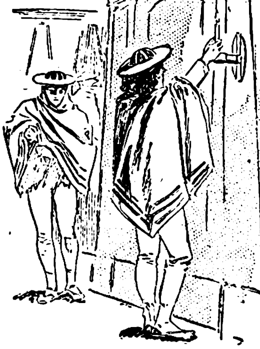
"Go now and bring the others down—first the soldiers with their officer, by whose side you must keep closely, and see that your knife is ready. Then let Ainu bring the Men of the Blood and the strangers quickly after them and bid Anahuac and Ainu close the door when the last man has entered."

He bowed his head, and the two went out and left me sitting there on the throne, waiting to play my part in the scene that was to follow, and strike the first blow in the battle that I had come to fight. Presently I heard the rattle of arms and the sound of footsteps coming along the passage. I took one of the revolvers out of my belt and held it ready under my cloak, and sat still and rigid as the effigy of Yupanqui, looking straight before me at the entrance at the other end.

Tupac came in first, and close behind him was a Spanish officer with a drawn sword in his hand. After him came the soldiers, two and two, with their rifles and bayonets. The officer stopped and stared about him, blinking with eyes half dazzled by the sudden light and the glitter of the gold and jewels which he saw wherever he looked. The same instant I saw the gleam of steel in Tupac's hand close to the Spaniard's throat. Then he said to him in Spanish:

"Put up your sword, Señor, and come with me and beg your life from the Son of the Sun who sits yonder on his throne."

The Spaniard uttered a loud cry of amazement as his eyes fell upon me, for so far he had not seen me, having been too much taken up by the splendours of the hall. Then he turned and called to his soldiers, but while the cry was still in his throat Tupac's arm went round his neck and the knife-point touched his skin. Then he bade two of the soldiers take the sword out of his hand and hold him fast, which they did greatly to his wonder, for he did not know that the betrayer was already betrayed. As soon as he was safe Tupac told the other soldiers to take their places along the walls, and they did so in silence, yet wondering greatly at all they saw. There were four and twenty of them, not counting the two who held the officer, all men of Indian blood whom the Spaniards* had made rather slaves than soldiers to fight their petty quarrels for them for little pay and scanty food.


The others were lighting candles.

After them came Anahuac and Ainu and the rest of the Men of the Blood, bringing with them Djama and the Professor blindfolded and Francis Hartness with his eyes unbound. All this time I had neither moved nor made a sound, and the soldiers were looking at me almost in terror, wondering whether I was truly a living man or one of the dead Incas with living eyes in his head. As for the Spanish officer, being a coward, as many of his sort are, he was already white with fear and his knees were shaking as he stood between the two soldiers who held him. When all had entered Anahuac came and prostrated himself before me and said:

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*The Inca naturally does not distinguish between the modern Peruvians and their Spanish ancestors.

"The commands of the Son of the Sun are obeyed. All are here and the door is shut."

Before I answered him I called Francis Hartness to me and said:

"Come here and stand by me, my friend, for I shall need your counsel."

He came and stood by me on my right hand, saying as he looked still wonderingly about him:

"This means treachery, I suppose, and after that, tragedy. Is that why you left Ruth and Golden Star in the fortress? I am afraid I see what it means, and I hope for Ruth's sake you will do justice with as much mercy as you can."

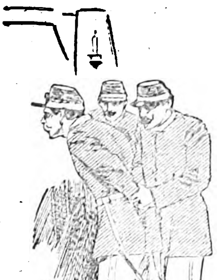
"You shall see," I answered. "But if it were not for her you would see justice without mercy."

Then I bade Anahuac rise and told him and Tupac to unbind the eyes of Djama and the Professor and bring them before me.

As Djama's eyes opened to the light he stared about him in silence for a moment. His face was very pale, and his lips were twitching and trembling. The Professor, too, looked about him, also wondering greatly at what he saw, but neither of them spoke till they had been led forward and stood before me. Then, while Djama still kept silence, the Professor, looking from me to Hartness, said in a voice that had much wonder but no fear or sign of guilt in it:

"What is this? What does all this mean? What are all these soldiers here for, Vilcaroya? I thought it was so important that all this should be kept secret? Surely no one has betrayed you already? But no, that can't be. Hartness, what *does* it all mean?"

"It means, first," I said, speaking very slowly and not in a loud voice, "that you have been brought here with Laurens Djama to take the oath which you agreed to take never to reveal the secrets of the things that you have learned. I ask your pardon for the rude way in which my people have brought you, but it was necessary."



He was already white with fear.

Then I turned to Djama who was standing solemn and motionless with clenched teeth and set face like one who knows that he stands near his doom and has no hope of mercy, and said:

"Now, Laurens Djama, are you ready to do as you promised to do when I said that I would give you the half of this gold for what you have done for me and Golden Star? Are you ready to swear the oath here, in the presence of these witnesses that you swore to me then?"

He drew himself up and looked at me boldly, for he was a brave man although his heart was black, and said to me with a hard, harsh laugh in his voice:

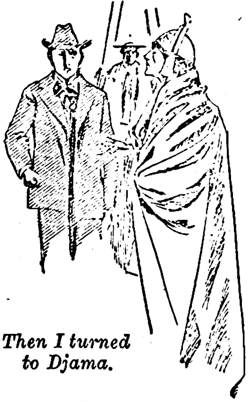
"You have been too clever for me, and so I suppose you have the right to mock me. There is no need to go on with this farce. The sight of your treasures gave me the gold-fever I suppose, and it drove me mad as it has driven many others mad, and I betrayed you. There is no use saying any more. I see that I have been betrayed, too, and that my life is in your hands, so I need only say that I keep the right of taking it myself in my own way."

"There is no need for that yet," I said, "and others are concerned in this beside you."

Then I turned from him to Francis Hartness and said:

"I cannot speak the Spanish speech, and I would not if I could. Do you therefore speak to the Spaniard yonder and bid him say how he came to be here with his soldiers. Tell him, too, that if he lies or refuses to speak he shall be buried in the gold he came to steal until the weight of it crushes his life out. But say to him that if he speaks the truth and holds nothing back and does as I shall bid him he shall have his life, and afterwards as much gold as three men can carry."

So then Francis Hartness turned to the trembling Spaniard and questioned him, and he confessed freely as soon as he knew he was not to be killed, and told how Djama had gone to the Governor of Cuzco and told him of my coming and of a great treasure that he would show him, and of others that I knew the secret of and might be made to reveal, and how he had bargained that half of all that was found should be his and the other half the Governor's if he would help him to carry it to the coast in safety and put it on a steamer. The Spaniard told also how the Governor, who was his own father, had only half believed this story, and had bidden him bring a company of soldiers to the appointed place and see if there was any truth in Djama's story, and if he found there was, to take Djama and all of us prisoners and carry us back to Cuzco and put us into the prison until he could question us the next day.



Then I turned to Djama.

When he had finished, Djama laughed again and said:

"There's the honour of a Peruvian! Serve me right for being such a fool as to trust to it!"

But I bade him sternly to hold his peace till he should be told to speak, and then, when Francis Hartness had told me in English what the Spaniard had said, I bade Tupac and Anahuac stand forward and tell of their share in what had been done so that all might understand. They told their story in Quichua, and when I translated it into English to Francis Hartness I made few words of it, of which the meaning was this.

Ever since Tupac and his comrades had recognised me as their Lord and sworn their faith to me they and others whom they trusted had industriously spread abroad the news of my coming, though telling nothing that would make a traitor able to betray us, and in proof of their story little wedges of gold, stamped with the ancient symbol of the Sun, had been passed from hand to hand as earnest of my promise that I would use the hidden treasures of the Incas for the benefit of my people and make gold money where now there was only silver and copper.

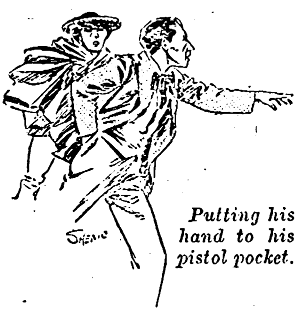
By this time, not only had the golden wedges gone far and wide through the land, but nearly all the soldiers of pure Indian blood had been won over to my cause, for, as I have said, and as everyone in the country knows, these soldiers are treated with great hardness by their Spanish masters, who often pay them nothing for many weeks or months together, and give them scanty food and hard usage, and cast them into prison or flog them and shoot them if they think to do anything to get justice. Moreover, there are always factions of men they call politicians, scheming for power and setting the soldiers fighting against one another and against their countrymen for no benefit to themselves. So what Francis Hartness had told me on the night that Golden Star had come back to life had already begun to come true. More than half the garrison of Cuzco had already been won over, and only waited for the signal which should bid the whole Indian population of the valley rise to seize the arms and ammunition in the city and make the officers and the Governor and all the officials prisoners.

Anahuac's daughter was a servant in the Governor's house, and this girl understood Spanish, though she pretended only to know Quichua and the dialect of the people, and she had been set to watch,* and Tupac's eldest son had also been secretly watching all the comings and goings of Djama since we came to Cuzco. In this way his visit to the Governor had been made known to me, and then one of the soldiers in the company that had been ordered to go with the Governor's son to the Rodadero had told Tupac of the order, and I had arranged with him how the surprise was to be carried out, and this, as you have seen, had been done with complete success.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A Golden Prison.

When I had finished telling this to Hartness I turned to the Professor and said to him kindly:



Putting his hand to his pistol pocket.

"There has been nothing said that brings any share of the guilt of this treason to you, so now if you will promise me on your faith and honour as an Englishman to keep my secrets and obey such commands as I shall put upon you for our own safety and that of all of us, you shall go free and you shall have the choice of going back to England or to any other country until the war is over, or of staying here under my protection until you can go away safely with the treasure which shall be yours. But if you go now you cannot take it with you, for in a few days from now there will be war throughout the whole land, and it would be impossible to take so much treasure to the coast. Now, what do you say?"

He thought for a moment and then he said:

"I am not a man of war as you know, Vilcaroya, but I hope I am a man of honour. I have never breathed a syllable that could have given anyone an inkling of your secret, and I promise you solemnly that I never will. What Djama has done distresses me even more than it amazes me. I would have staked my life on his honesty, and if you will release him and let him come with me——"

"No, no, my friend," I said, quickly and sternly. "What you would ask is impossible. His aims were deeper and his sin was blacker than it has been shown to be here. He did not betray us for gold alone, for he knew that I would keep my promise and give him more than he could want. He would have given me to my enemies to be killed—it might have been by tortures to make me say where my treasures were hidden—so that he might have had Golden Star at his mercy."

"It was your own fault, curse you! why did you not give her to me?" Djama cried suddenly, breaking loose from the two who held his arms and putting his hand to his pistol pocket. The next instant my own revolver was out from under my cloak and levelled at his heart.

"Another motion and I will kill you," I said. "Though so quick a death would be too good for you. Tie his hands behind his back and hold him faster this time. Give me his pistol."

Before I had done speaking they had seized him again in spite of his struggles, and paying no heed to his cries and imprecations—for by this time his long pent-up passion had broken loose and made him almost mad—and when they had given me his pistol I said to him:

"I told you that Golden Star should be yours if you could win her as an honest man. But you sought to steal her as you would have stolen my gold. That is enough, keep silence now or you shall be gagged."

Then I held out my hand to the Professor and said:

"I will accept your promise, for you are an honest man. There is my hand. Now we will be friends as before, and I will answer for your safety. Will you go or stay with us?"

"I will stay," he said, "for my studies are not yet complete, and besides I am anxious to see what the Inca empire will be like when it is restored."

"I am glad that you say so," I replied, "for you are welcome and you shall make your home here always if you will."

Then I bade them stand the Spanish officer in the Professor's place beside Djama, and, turning to Francis Hartness, said:

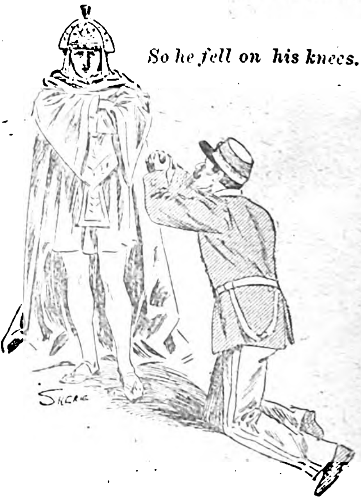
"These men are worthy of death, for they would have delivered us to death, but I cannot kill Djama since Joyful Star might hate me for it, and if I do not kill him it would not be justice to kill the Spaniard. What shall I do?"

"I see nothing for it," he said, after thinking awhile, "but shutting them up safely until we have got this business over and then sending them out of the country and forbidding them to come back under pain of death. There are plenty of places that they would be perfectly safe in."

"That is well thought of, my friend," I said, "and it shall be done. They came for gold and they shall have it. They shall live in it, and see gold and nothing but gold till the sight of it is hateful to them. They shall have a prison of gold, and eat and drink from gold, and sleep and walk and sit on gold. Yes, truly, they shall have enough of gold before they see the light of day again. Now tell the Spaniard what I have said."

He did so, and at first the wretch's eyes glittered and then grew dim when the true meaning of his doom came upon him, for it meant he knew not how long an imprisonment with a man who had betrayed his friends, and whom, as he had confessed, he would himself have betrayed; and he thought, too, that I had only promised him his life and the gold to make him speak, and that now I would keep him prisoner and perhaps kill him in the end. So he fell on his knees like the craven that he was and begged for mercy, and told Hartness of my promise, and with Hartness' lips I told him only that he must have patience and wait until it was my pleasure to do what I had said.

After this I called Tupac and Anahuac and told them what I wished done, and they took a score of their men and forthwith began to build in a corner of the hall beside the throne a chamber measuring some ten feet each way of the oblong blocks of gold which were piled up in the pyramid behind the throne, and while they were doing this I called the soldiers before me and told them, speaking in their own dialect, that if they were faithful to me until the end of the war each man should have two ounces weight of gold paid to him every month, and one ounce more for each of his comrades that he could persuade to join us, and for this night's work I would give them each a wedge of gold of the weight of four ounces, which was more money than all that they had earned in their lives before, and when I had promised this they went on their knees and swore faith to me and destruction to their hated Spanish masters.



So he fell on his knees.

Then I told them how Francis Hartness would lead them to battle and to victory as he had led the soldiers of his own nation, and after that he spoke to them in Spanish and told them what to tell their comrades and what was to be done with the arms and ammunition when the signal for the rising was given.

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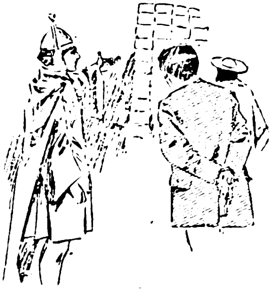
* This is quite a common thing in Peru, and the Indian women make exceedingly clever spies.

All this while Djama and the Spaniard were kept standing watching the building of their golden prison-cell. The men worked swiftly and the many hands made the toil light, and they built the walls up very thick and strong, fitting the golden bricks closely into each other and making the walls smooth and without hand or foot-hold, so that neither could any of the bricks be got out nor the walls be climbed. The cell was divided into two by another wall, and when the walls were finished they were about ten feet high and there was an opening into each cell in front large enough for a man to crawl in on his hands and knees.


There is your house of gold.

When all was ready I said to Djama:

"There is your house of gold. Go and dwell in it till it shall be safe for me to release you. Every day, as I have said, you shall eat and drink from plates and cups of gold and you shall dream of gold until this gold-fever of yours is cured."

"Until I have gone gold-mad, you mean!" he cried, snarling at me like angry dog. "It is just such a vengeance as a half civilised tyrant would have thought of. You know as well as I do that I shall go mad in there unless I kill myself first."

"You have your choice!" I said. "I will make your punishment no lighter. If you think to pull the walls down they will fall on you and crush you, and you will be buried in gold, and if I am told that you have tried to break out, I will put chains of gold on you so heavy that you shall not be able to drag them across your cell, while if you are peaceful and patient all your wants shall be attended to by those that I shall appoint, and you shall have everything but liberty and the light of day. Now go in."

"I won't!" he cried with an imprecation that ended in a scream. "I shall go mad in there, I tell you, and that is a thousand times worse than death for me. I won't! I won't!"

"Then you shall be thrust in," I said.

I made a sign to those who held him, and they, seeing what I meant, took him by the body and the legs and carried him, feet foremost, kicking and struggling towards the hole. Then they thrust him in with his arms still bound. But when he was half-way through I bade one of them loose the cords a little, so that he could free himself afterwards. The Spaniard made no resistance, and when he was bidden crept trembling like a hound that has been flogged into his cell, and when they were both in I ordered the openings to be built up.

Francis Hartness and the Professor had gone away to the other end of the hall, not liking to see this, and yet knowing that it would be useless to seek to persuade me to more mercy.

"Our work here is done now," I said, going to them, "and it would be well for us to go back to the fortress and sleep, for the morning is near and there will be much work to do before long."

"I don't think I shall sleep much after what I have seen to-night," said Hartness, "and if I did sleep I think I should dream of that golden prison and those two poor wretches hungering and thirsting for daylight and liberty with the means of buying any luxury the world could give them within reach of their hands."

"Yes," said the Professor, "it is a curious situation, isn't it—quite apart from the personal interest it has for us. Now, in England or America, a room built with walls and floor of solid gold would be a luxury that only a millionaire could afford, and he would probably be thought a fool for building it, and yet here it is only a prison in which a man might well starve to death. Let us get away from here as soon as we can. I really don't want to hear any more of Djama's ravings than I can help. Good Heavens! who ever would have thought that a man of his culture and learning and strength of mind could possibly have made such a blackguard of himself?"

"Well," said Hartness, with a dry sort of laugh, "you see he was the victim of the two passions that have done most to drive men mad or make scoundrels of them since the world began—the love of woman and the lust for gold. I don't pretend to understand it myself, because he had gold enough promised to him, and there is no telling but that he might have won the woman; but there, you never can tell how far any man is mad or sane until he's tried."

"But there was something else, my friend," I said, "there was, as you say, lust of gold and love of woman, but there was also hate. Why, I know not; but though I owe my new life to that man, I have hated him and he has hated me since we learnt to know each other as living men. You know, too, how, as I told you, Golden Star shrank from him as though he had been a poisonous reptile, and yet why should I hate him and yet love her who is of the same flesh and blood as he is?"

"I would rather discuss the problem in the open air or at the hacienda than here," said the Professor, "and even then I don't suppose we should get much nearer to a solution, for these things are mysteries and mostly past finding out, yet it may be that you and he, the sons of different centuries, may actually have embodied in you the differences and the antipathies of the two ages and the two races to which you belong. There is no telling. But come, let us get out of here, please. I really can't stand this any longer."

"Nor I," said Hartness. "For goodness sake let us go! This is a good deal more trying to the nerves than a cavalry charge or a smart skirmish."

"Very well," I said. "We will go."

Then I called to Tupac and bade him tell the soldiers and the rest that the night's work was over and it was time to go. We gave each of the soldiers his wedge of gold, as I had promised them, and once more I made them swear that each would kill any of the others who thought to betray us. Then Tupac and Anahuac went and opened the stone door, and we returned from the Hall of Gold to the upper earth, leaving Djama and his fellow traitor still raving and crying within the walls of their golden prison.

(*To be continued.*)

A GRAND NEW SERIAL STORY

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TREASURES OF THE WHITE GOD.

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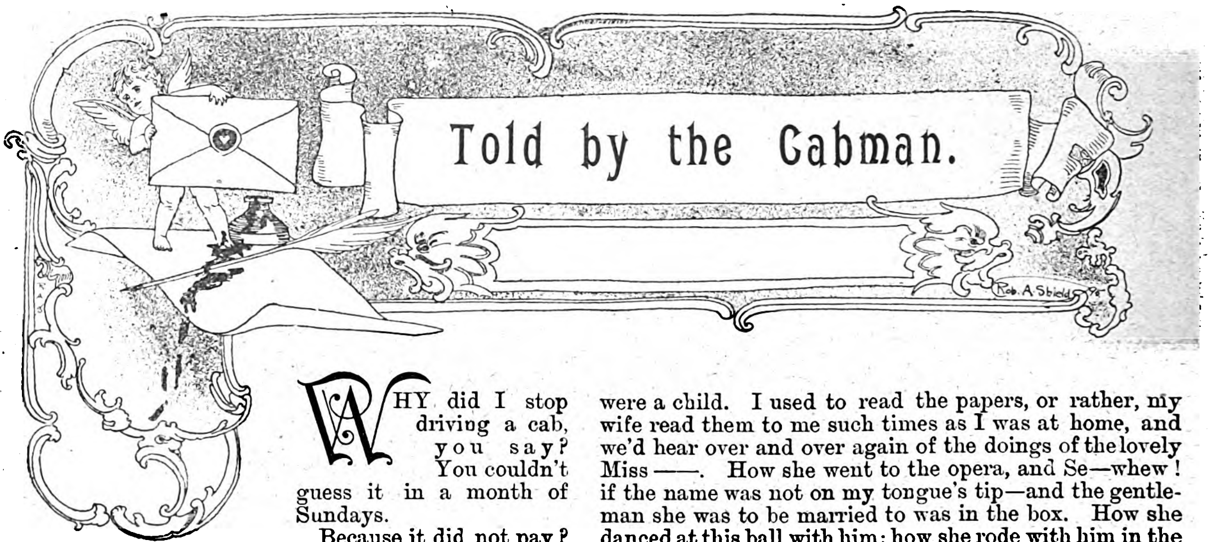


Told by the Cabman.

WHY did I stop driving a cab, you say? You couldn't guess it in a month of Sundays.

Because it did not pay? Oh, no; it paid. A cabman pockets many a shilling that no one knows anything about.

Many a story I could tell you that you would say you couldn't believe.

I drove an escaped felon once, who changed his clothes in my cab, and came out looking like a young minister in a white cravat and blue spectacles.

"Johnny, burn those things inside your trap," says he, when I set him down at a station, and threw me two quid; and I burnt the convict suit and the old woman's gown and hood that had covered them.

I read about his scrape next day. He was a counterfeiter; but the money he had given me was genuine.

Driving about London at night was lively, and it paid.

My reason for leaving the business isn't to be told in a few words, but if you like to hear the story, here it is:

One of my regular fares was a gentleman that belonged to a swell club.

He was as handsome a man of forty as you ever saw in your life.

Why, you'd know his name if I was to tell it, though he died five years ago. He was rich, and he was high in politics, and every one knew he was going to marry a Society girl, a beauty of eighteen. When a man gets famous enough to have these things put in the papers, you may say he is a well-known man.

Oh, everybody knew him, high and low. How often I used to drive him to see that girl! You see my cab was a natty little affair that stylish men liked, and my horse was a dandy.

Almost always he stopped at the florist's for flowers, or at a big confectioner's or at a jeweller's. He went with his hands full every time.

Generally he took his sweetheart out in something else; but I've driven them often enough, too, and she was one of those angelic-looking girls, with fair hair, and blue eyes, that make you feel as if sin could not come near them. She had soft, baby ways, too, and seemed to love him almost as much as he loved her, though in another way entirely.

She looked up to him, and he treated her as if she were a child. I used to read the papers, or rather, my wife read them to me such times as I was at home, and we'd hear over and over again of the doings of the lovely Miss ——. How she went to the opera, and Se—whew! if the name was not on my tongue's tip—and the gentleman she was to be married to was in the box. How she danced at this ball with him; how she rode with him in the park; how they were to be married by half-a-dozen bishops; how this belle and that belle would be bridesmaids. Then again something else. My wife was so mighty interested, because I drove the man you see. But there was something I did not tell my wife—the best of women talk too much. Four or five times I had seen Miss —— when she was not with her future husband; far from it.

At these times she was always walking with a lackadaisical masher sort of chap—very loving and confidential. It was always in some queer, out-of-the-way place. Once when I'd driven a party out to High Bridge; once in Bushey Park—Sunday, when society folks don't go there—once at the Crystal Palace at the fireworks, and then his arm was about her waist. Once—well, no matter—lots of times.

But still it might be no harm, a bit of flirtation, and it warn't my place to blab to the big man who was going to marry her.

But one day the masher came into our stables to hire a cab for himself, and when he had gone I went to the boss.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Jenckens," I said, "I'd ask you to tell me that chap's name; seems to me I've seen him."

"That?" said Jenckens. "Why, that's the tenor at the Covent Garden show. They say he sings like a lark, and that all the girls are in love with him, that Society women write him love-letters, and that he cuts up high jinks generally. Signor Marini, that's his name; and he's one of those darned Eyetalians."

The boss didn't set much store by Eyetalians, you see.

"Thank you, sir," I says; and to myself, says I: "Ah, ha, and oh, ho! them society girls with angel faces are not to be depended upon. I'll never judge a woman by her eyes again, nor by her manners."

That was in October, and that night I drove the future husband to Miss ——'s, to a dinner party her mother gave.

I knew what it was, and of course he was mentioned among the guests.

Two months from that night—yes, it was just two months—my gentleman came to me with a look on his face that I had never seen before.

"Dick," said he, "walk out with me, will you?" And, of course, I walked.

When we were quite out of earshot of the stables, he said: "I'm going to order a cab to-night, and ask for you as I always do. Drive off as usual, but put the cab somewhere and hire the shabbiest concern you can find, and meet me at two o'clock at night at the corner of —— Street, near the new building."

"Yes, sir," said I.

"At two," said he again. "Sit on your box and wait."

"What larks can he be up to now?" says I to myself; but I only answered: "Yes, sir."

The order was given to the boss for "Eleven o'clock, go and return," and at half-past one I'd exchanged the cabs and had the most rickety old trap you ever saw at the corner he mentioned.

A minute or so after, a big man in a long ulster and soft hat came up.

"Cab engaged?" said he.

I knew Mr. ——'s voice, but I answered: "No, sir," and he put his foot on the step.

"Drive on half way down —— street," said he, "and stop until I tell you to go on."

At two we were in the square the angelic young lady lived in, not quite opposite the house. At ten minutes past two a man turned out of Grosvenor Avenue and walked up the street. He was whistling one of the prettiest tunes I ever heard, though what it was I could not tell you, and he passed the door of the house Miss —— lived in and went on to the corner.

It was the man I had seen her with; it was the man the boss had told me was Signor Marini. He did not whistle this time, but when he came to the door again he went softly up the steps and seemed to be let in by some one.

I waited fifteen minutes; he did not come out. Half an hour he was there still.

"You can drive on," said a voice from the door of the cab, "and up the avenue until I tell you to drop me."

I did what he told me to do, of course, then exchanged my cab and went home.

Three times I did this. Three times I saw Signor Marini enter Miss ——'s house. The last time a five-pound note was put into my hand, and for six days I did not hear from my gentleman.

The next time I did, he told me that I was to call for him at his hotel at nine o'clock. I went.

He came down in evening dress with his light overcoat on his arm and a crush hat in his hand.

"To —— club-house," he said, nodding at me; "and I want you to wait at the side entrance. Don't leave your box."

"All right, sir," said I. He reached something up to me. I thought it was a cigar, and just said: "Thank ye." But it turned out to be a roll of five-pound notes—ten of them. I knew that that meant business.

They were having a grand time at the club, and the time passed on and they grew jollier.

It was two o'clock when I saw the tenor, Signor Marini, who was one of the guests, I heard afterwards, come out and walk away. The next minute my gentleman came out at the side door, without his hat, without his overcoat. He crossed the pavement at a stride, and stepped into the cab. There was no one at the club door.

"Follow that man," he whispered through the window behind my seat. I did it. Just before we got to the corner of the street where the young lady lived, he stopped me. By the light of the lamp we saw the singer turn the corner. It was a dark night, and a storm was coming up. I heard my cab door open, and saw my gentleman step out and pass the lamp. Two minutes more and I heard the report of a pistol. Then I saw my gentleman coming back. He stepped into the cab, and said: "The club, and wait there."

I drove him there. It was four before the last man went home. The last man was my gentleman. Two waiters helped him out. He seemed very tipsy, and roared that he wanted to open another bottle, and wanted someone to sing another song. They packed him into the cab, laughing.

"He don't do it often, either," one of the waiters said: "but he's got his load this time."

I laughed, too, and drove away. At his hotel the waiters had to help him in.

Very tipsy he looked, very, but in a minute one of the men came down and called to me, laughing:

"Mr. —— says you shan't have your fare if you don't come to get it," said he.

"All right," said I, and I went up.

As soon as I entered the door I shut it, and he got up off the bed where he lay sprawling, no more tipsy than you are this minute.

"How much?" says he.

"How much?" says I.

"Yes," says he, "how much? You drew a ticket in the lottery, you know."

"Did I?" says I.

"Yes," says he. "It is enough to enable you to leave cab-driving and start a public, and I'll cash it for you," says he.

He was as cool as a cucumber; so was I.

"You read figures better than I do," says I.

"Very well," says he, and went to his desk and wrote me out a cheque.

The next day a column of the paper was headed:

"Frightful Murder! The Great Tenor, Signor Marini, Shot in the Back on his Way Home from the —— Club Supper! Found Dead!"

And on Sunday my wife read another paragraph:

"Society is somewhat excited over the news that Miss —— has broken off her engagement with Mr. —— after all the arrangements had been made for the wedding."

"Why, your gentleman is jilted," said my wife.

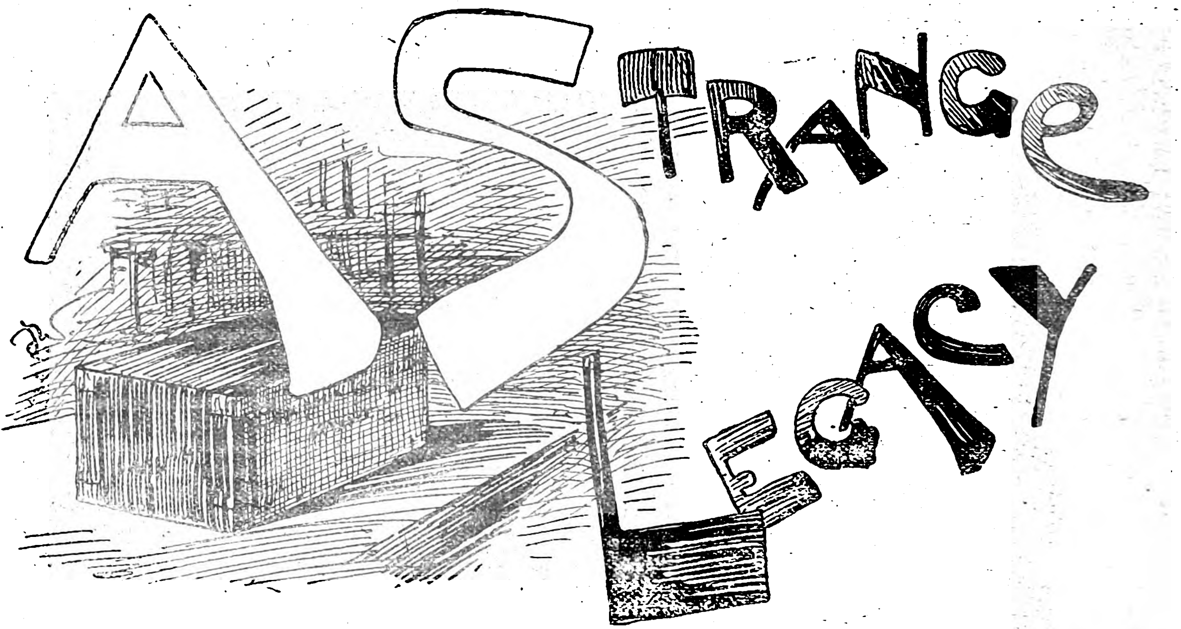
"Seems so," said I, laughing.

Oh, well, no one asked me to tell what I knew, and I never did.

I have my public; my gentleman died five years ago; and Miss —— is married to a rich merchant.

F. V. ROSE.

* * *



MORE or less, in legal phraseology, it amounted to this: The testator, Benjamin Longfellow, of Paternoster Row, E.C., publisher, bequeathed to his brother, Andrew Longfellow, of Adelaide, South Australia, wool merchant, the balance standing to the credit of his personal account at his bankers', Messrs. Claycross, Beeming, Toots, Childers, and Co., upon the day of his death; also to his said brother, Andrew Longfellow, a black tin box, inscribed with the testator's name and the abbreviation "Auto," together with the contents of the box, at that time deposited for safe custody at the bankers' above mentioned.

Now, so far as the former clause was concerned, there was nothing extraordinary about the legacy save the fact that, on his deathbed, Mr. Benjamin Longfellow, being then of sound mind, had signed a cheque for £1,000 in favour of a deserving charity, to wit, the Royal Asylum for Impotent Artists, and in doing so had, advertently or inadvertently, reduced the said balance at his bankers' to the insignificant sum of 3s. 4d., at which figure it stood at the hour of his death.

Whether the dying publisher drew the cheque in ignorance of the figures in his pass-book, or whether he conceived himself justified in alienating the sum which, in the ordinary course of nature, would have passed to his younger brother, was a matter for his own conscience (if he had any) to decide.

What was truly extraordinary was the legacy of a black tin box.

From the point of view of sentiment, our South Australian wool merchant received the news of his dear brother's death with truly fraternal indifference. The two men had not met for many years. They had been left orphans at an early age. They were educated for charity's sake by a distant relation, and were then turned out into the world to make a living for themselves. Neither of them had ever married. Benjamin entered the city office of a publisher, and in due time (as it pleases the story-tellers to put it) raised himself by industry and perseverance to be head partner of the publishing firm, and thus to be one of the richest men in London.

Andrew, on the other hand, emigrated. He likewise, in due course, raised himself by industry and perseverance (or, as envious competitors declared, by impudence and sharp practice) to be the wealthiest man in South Australia. Indeed, so rich had he grown, and so insufferably pompous had he become, that South Australia was heartily sick of him. At last an influential syndicate had waited on him and offered to make it worth his while to part with his interest in the colony, and to go home to England to buy a baronetcy. It was at this moment that he heard of his brother's death in London. Expecting to be that gentleman's heir, he accepted the syndicate's flattering offer (including the promise of a baronetcy, if it could be had), and took the first steamer for England.

Not till he arrived in London, and called upon the family solicitors, did Andrew Longfellow learn the true state of affairs: namely, that he had only inherited 3s. 4d. and a black tin box! The remainder of Benjamin Longfellow's vast fortune was left to trustees for the building of model lodging houses in Belgravia and the endowment of a bishopric in the Uninhabited Islands.

This information was given to Andrew Longfellow by a junior partner in the firm of lawyers.

The colonial millionaire could scarcely conceal his rage at the absurd nature of the legacy—3s. 4d. and a black tin box!

"Confound it!" he exclaimed. "Am I to be a laughing stock?"

"You forget, my dear sir," answered the solicitor, "that the contents of the black tin box may outweigh the interest and literary value any mere pecuniary mark of esteem which your brother could have bequeathed to you."

"Interest! Literary value! What is that to me? Is that all you have to say?"

"Mr. Andrew Longfellow," retorted the other with some indignation, "it is not my business to say anything at all. My senior partner is the executor. I must refer you to him. He is absent this morning, but may return at any moment. If you will give me your address, I have no doubt he will be glad to call on you."

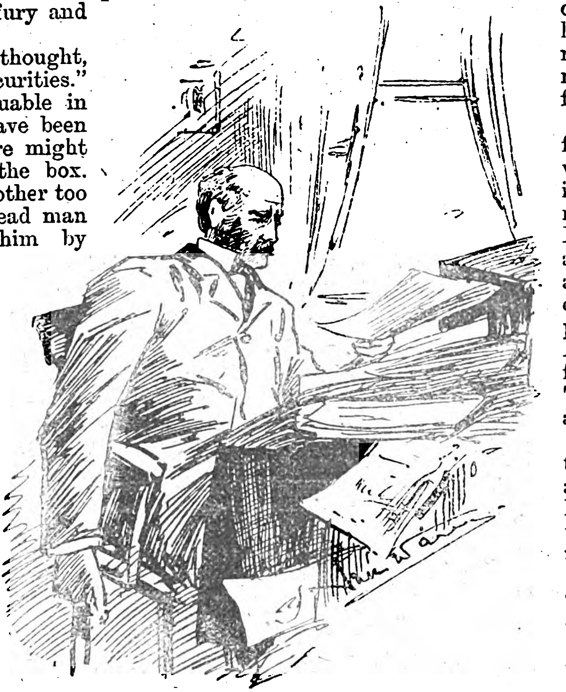
Mr. Longfellow growled out the name of his hotel.

"Meanwhile," continued the solicitor, "I may add that I have been given instructions to hand over to you your property, if you should be here."

The wool merchant grew purple.

"You can keep your infernal 3s. 4d.," he vociferated. "Give me the box!"

In the ten minutes which passed on the way to the hotel, Mr. Longfellow worked himself up into a truly horrible state of alternating fury and expectation.



While he did so, his brow grew darker and darker.

"Perhaps, after all," he thought, "the box contains bonds and securities." The contents were surely valuable in their way, or they would not have been deposited at the bankers. There might be script of great value in the box. Perhaps he had judged his brother too hastily over the 3s. 4d. The dead man had possibly compensated him by adding at the last moment to the treasures stored in the box, which was heavy enough, in all conscience!

These and other speculations filled his thoughts on the way to the hotel, and he arrived there nervous and irritable, but eager notwithstanding.

Andrew Longfellow shut himself up in his sitting-room and locked the door. Having placed on the table in the middle of the room the black tin box, inscribed with his brother's name and the word "Auto," he inserted and turned the key. As the lid went back, he looked anxiously inside.

"Well, I'm dashed!" he muttered between his teeth.

Again and again he thrust in his hands, feverishly turning the contents out upon the table. While he did so, his brow grew darker and darker. The weight of the box was accounted for by the piles upon piles of letters and foolscap which were taken from it. But there was no sign of bond, coupon, share, certificate, debenture, bank-note, bill, or anything else of current value.

Nothing but bundles of letters and reams of dog's-eared manuscript! Nothing better than love-letters beginning with "Dearest" or "Darling," or some milk-sop twaddle of that kind. Pshaw! Nothing better than unbusinesslike business letters, such as unpractical dreamers might write to their publishers. Nothing better than foolscap spattered with ink, and recording the sentimental rubbish of boobies who aspired to scribble novels and poetry. Pah! To a man of common sense like Andrew Longfellow it was sickening!

Who wrote those silly epistles, and other maudlin trash? He didn't know; he didn't care. What were they to him? He couldn't read the signatures. Even if he could have done so, their names would perhaps have been unknown to him. He had lived a busy Australian life all these years, and neither knew nor cared a rap about literary people—"lazy good-for-nothings who scribbled," as he expressed it. He was a practical man, and as such lashed himself into a fury of indignation at having been made a fool of by his brother leaving him nothing better than 3s. 4d., a black tin box and a hundredweight of good "cream-laid" and "fools-cap," spoilt by pen and ink.

"Waste paper," he muttered again and again.

The disappointed millionaire marched up and down his sitting-room. After a while he threw himself into a chair, and tried to read the newspapers. But the news of the day did not interest him; he knew all the news he wanted to know, namely, that he had been fooled.

Even the advertisements failed to attract, until the very words "waste paper" in print caught his eye. He read: "Mr. and Mrs. Moses Moses have left-off wearing apparel of every kind. Mr. and Mrs. M. purchase old clothes, jewellery, teeth, waste paper, etc., for ready money. Apply——." Andrew Longfellow jumped to his feet. The street named in the advertisement was close by.

In five minutes he was interviewing Mr. Moses Moses, and in five minutes more Mr. Moses Moses followed the wool merchant into his sitting-room at the hotel.

"Now, thir," said the Jew, "vat can I do for you to-day?"

"You give ready money for waste paper, don't you?"

"All dependeth, my vriend," replied the Hebrew cautiously. "Vare's the paper?"

"Here," answered the wool merchant, pointing to the table.

The Jew glanced at the article, and then at the gentleman before him and grinned.

"'Aven't you got anything better than that to thell?" he asked.

"How much?" inquired Longfellow.

"What for?"

"For that lot of paper, of course."

The Jew turned over the love-letters and peered into the manuscripts, and once again looked at the wool merchant—this time with a curious expression of face, which the latter did not observe.

"Come, come, Moses, name your price!"

Still the Jew hesitated. He turned over the bundle of letters once more, and at length asked sharply:

"Vat do you vant for them?"

"That's my business. What will you give me?"

Andrew Longfellow was not a man to give anything away. He wished the buyer to name his price.

"They ain't vorth anything but vaste paper."

"I know that well enough!" ejaculated the old Australian.

Once more the Jew looked at him, and this time with the most peculiar expression of all.

"I'll give you five bob for them, not a thickpenth more, ath I'm a shentleman!"

"Ten shillings," demanded Longfellow.

The wily Jew knew all he required. It was evident that the vendor was entirely ignorant of any special value in the manuscripts.

"Five bob, and I sha'l be a loother any'ow."

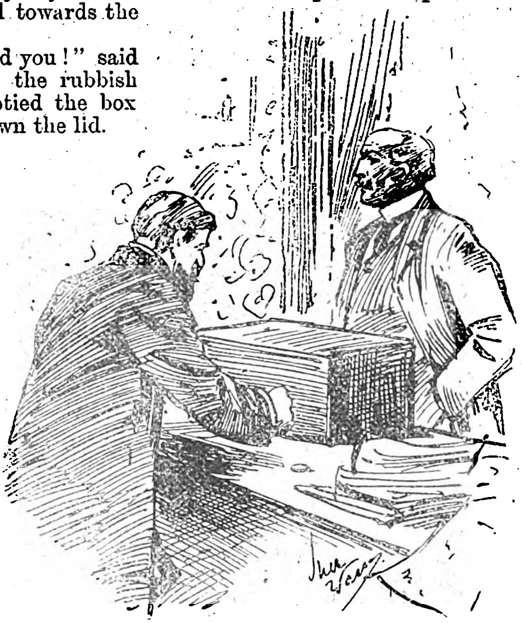
"No!"

"Very vell, thir! If you ever vanth to thell any wearin' apparelth——"

"Here, make it seven-and-sixpence, Moses."

"Couldn't do it, thir; good day to you, thir!" and the Jew took up his hat and moved towards the door.

"Five shillings, then, confound you!" said Mr. Longfellow. "Only take the rubbish away immediately," and he emptied the box out on to the table, and shut down the lid.



"Five bob, thir; there you are, thir."

"Thirtainly, thir, anythink t'oblidth. Five bob, thir; there you are, thir," and Moses laid two half-crowns on the table.

Then, with an alacrity that was truly surprising, he produced a linen bag from his pocket, swept the papers from the table, and rang the bell for a porter to help him carry off the heavy bundle.

This done, he requested the wool merchant to give him a written receipt for the five shillings. At first the millionaire ridiculed this request as being unnecessary. But the Jew insisted that "buthiness ith buthiness," and the formal receipt was at last written out, signed, and handed to him. Another moment and he was gone.

The door had scarcely closed upon him, and the bundle he was rapidly carrying away, with a porter's aid, when it was thrown open again, and a visitor entered. The new-comer announced himself as the executor of the late Mr. Benjamin Longfellow's will and the head partner of the firm of solicitors on whom Mr. Andrew Longfellow had called that morning.

"Mr. Andrew Longfellow, I presume?"

"That's my name."

"Of course, now I can see the likeness to your late brother. By-the-bye, let me congratulate you, my dear sir, on your good fortune."

"Eh?"

"Perhaps you have not yet had time to examine the contents of the black tin box. Ah! there it is! Again let me congratulate you."

"I don't understand!" gasped the wool merchant.

"No? Why, sir, you have inherited, in the contents of that box, the finest collection of modern literary autographs in the world."

Andrew Longfellow's breath stopped, and he sank into a chair. The visitor, whose eyes rested on the outward and empty shell of the black tin box, while his fingers tapped out, so to speak, the memories connected with it, did not notice the effects of the shock he had unwittingly inflicted on the owner of the box.

"No doubt I surprise you, sir," he continued. "If there is five shillings in that box, there is £20,000. Indeed, the collection is literally priceless. It contains Burns' letters to his publishers; Scott's correspondence with his cousin; Dickens' manuscript of—I forget which of his novels; Tennyson's first draft of—I cannot recall which of Tennyson's poems it is; Lord Byron's love-letters to—I really do not remember which of his friends it was; Bulwer-Lytton's notes for a novel, to eclipse all his previous efforts; Thackeray's memoranda, with the original sketches, about—dear, dear! how my memory fails me!—to say nothing of Macaulay's commonplace books, and hundreds of other priceless treasures. Why, Mr. Longfellow, you are not looking well! Bless my soul! if the poor gentleman hasn't fainted for joy!"

In the frantic desire to speak, and cry "stop thief!" Mr. Andrew Longfellow had lost his power of speech, and swooned away.

He never recovered from the shock. When he came back to his senses, and was able to communicate what was in his mind, he explained matters to the horrified solicitor. Inquiries were at once set on foot, as to the movements of Mr. Moses Moses; but that astute party had anticipated them, and provided accordingly. Nothing but negative information about him was ever forthcoming.

"Mr. Moses had not come home!" Mr. Moses did not come home for months, nay, for years.

"Nobody knew where Mr. Moses was!" Not even Mrs. Moses.

Nothing was ever heard of him until long after Mr. Andrew Longfellow's brain had entirely given way. Nothing whatever was heard of Mr. Moses till the whole "sensation" had long blown over.

The Jew did not attempt to rely on proving his title to the manuscripts with the receipt for five shillings. He preferred taking an enjoyable tour on the American continent, and finally settling down on that side of the Atlantic under an assumed name.

What he did with the waste paper sold to him by Mr. Andrew Longfellow was never exactly known. The individual manuscripts, however, have been publicly sold from time to time in the United States, and have fetched fabulous sums.

The black tin box is empty to this day.

PAUL ROPER.

A Story of the Jury Room.

So he is dead!

I looked again at the newspaper which I held in my hand and read:

"Jethro.—Died, near Hurstmere, March 18th, 1893, Emanuel Jethro, aged fifty-seven years."

He is dead after all these years, and at last I am free to reveal a terrible secret of a jury-room which has been a burden to myself and ten other men, unless they, like Jethro, have passed over the river.

In August, 1875, there was a murder trial in Hurstmere, which perhaps the older citizens of that town still remember.

I was the third juror chosen. After juror No. 6 was told to pass into the jury-box the court clerk called the name of "Emanuel Jethro."

I believe every one in the court-room was struck with the man's appearance. He walked briskly and in a peculiarly nervous manner which could not fail to attract attention. He answered the solicitor's questions eagerly. In fact, one time his answer came before the question was concluded.

The next morning the examinations of witnesses began. The evidence was short and it was conclusive.

Karl Belderman, a German youth employed as a gardener near the city, was charged with murdering his employer by splitting open his head with an axe.

He and the head-gardener had lived alone. One morning the boy came into the town, and while drinking freely had shown a large sum of money. A day later the head-gardener was found lying dead upon the floor of a room in his house, with the bloody axe that had done the work by his side..

The German youth was arrested, with some of the money still in his possession. There was proof that the boy and the gardener had been heard quarrelling about an increase of wages, which the boy had asked for and did not get.

To offset this strong array of circumstantial evidence there was nothing but the prisoner's statement, very badly told by an interpreter. He denied all knowledge of the murder, and said the money he had was given him by a man the night before as a bribe to leave his employer, that he knew nothing of the killing or who did it.

When we reached the jury-room, there seemed but two things to do—elect a foreman and bring in a verdict of guilty.

The first we did with little trouble.

Then we took a ballot, merely as a matter of form. I counted the votes, and it stood—For conviction, 11; for acquittal, 1.

"Who is the twelfth gentleman who does not know murder when he sees it?" one of the jurors asked sarcastically.

"I am," came the reply, calmly spoken by juror No. 7—Emanuel Jethro.

Then we began to argue the case with him. He looked out of the window most of the time and made no reply to any of our telling arguments. Finally he was asked if he had any reason to advance for voting as he did.

"None at all," he replied quietly, "except that I don't wish to see an innocent man hanged."

There were some more convincing arguments by the 11, and we took another vote—for conviction, 11; for acquittal, 1.

And that was the way the vote stood next morning after breakfast. We grew desperate. Finally the whole manner of Jethro changed, and he exclaimed excitedly:

"If each of you will take a solemn oath before the God that made you not to reveal what I tell you until I am dead, I will give you the reason why I do not agree to a verdict of guilty."

After some consultation and glances at the clock, which showed that the hour for reconvening of court was at hand, we, one at a time, took the oath.

In low, half-whispered tones the juror told his secret.

Fifteen minutes later we went into the court-room with a verdict of "Not guilty."

I remember distinctly the consternation on the judge's face, and the look of disgust on that of the solicitor.

The newspapers criticised us severely, and went so far as to write editorials on account of the failure of the courts to adequately punish those detected in the commission of crime.

Well, Emanuel Jethro is dead, and I believe I am now absolved from the oath he made us take.

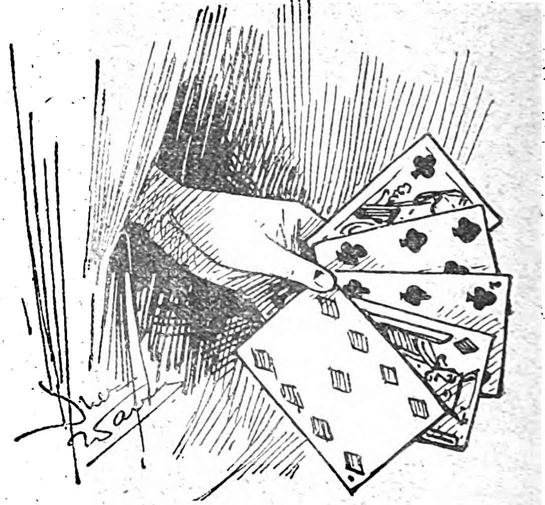
"That German boy did not kill the old man," he told us in his dry, husky voice. "On the night before the murder a man met him and paid him to leave the farm early next morning—gave him a large sum of money which was enough to tempt him to give up his situation. And then the man who did this watched the boy as he left next morning and slipped into the room and killed the old gardener as he was preparing to rise—killed him to pay a debt that only his blood could wipe out.

"And, gentlemen," he concluded, "I am the murderer."

We looked upon the man's ashen face as the words fell from his lips, and each of us knew the story was true.

E. C. Waggener.

The Card-Sharper's Daughter.



IF love at first sight be possible, I certainly was in love with her.

It was in my young days, when I was visiting Paris for my amusement. I had been strolling about the city all the morning, and towards noon I found myself in the neighbourhood of the Faubourg St. Germain, when I caught sight of the beautiful unknown.

She was plainly though tastefully dressed, and had evidently been marketing, for she carried several parcels, and was accompanied by a peasant girl with some bundles of vegetables. Never, I thought, had I beheld a being so beautiful. I was not a young man to be struck with an ordinary pretty face or comely figure. This lady's form and features indeed seemed faultless; but it was something more than that that had arrested my attention—something unusual in the sweet sadness of her expression, and in the deep, thoughtful earnestness of her large dark eyes.

I stood still as she passed me, and our eyes met. Her look was cold and haughty then, and I turned away, feeling rather abashed, and not daring to follow her.

For days and days I lingered about in the hope of meeting her again, but without success; and at last I made up my mind that I would try to forget that I had ever seen her.

At about that time I made the acquaintance of M. Auguste Verrier. He was a person of venerable aspect, with long white hair and a patriarchal beard. His appearance did not betoken wealth, but his generally cultivated bearing suggested that he had seen better days.

We first met in a café to which I occasionally resorted, and I soon found from his conversation that he was a man of considerable education.

After we had met some half-a-dozen times, I happened to mention that I took great interest in matters pertaining to art. He then informed me that he was a painter by profession, and modestly invited me to accompany him to his studio and inspect some of his works.

I assented, and he conducted me to a crazy, old, half-timbered house, long since pulled down, in the Faubourg St. Germain. Here, having ascended to the topmost storey, we entered the studio, which presented a rather remarkable appearance.

There were numbers of pictures, some with frames and some without, stacked against the walls; and rows of dusty shelves, with books, casts, and human bones heaped upon them.

In one corner was a life-sized model of Apollo, and in the corner, diagonally facing it, a complete skeleton suspended from hooks in the wall. This, being on the same side as the window, was barely distinguishable in the deep shadow, and presented a strange, spectre-like appearance.

The other corner, on the same side, was occupied by the artist's easel and canvas, behind which was a lay figure dressed in a complete suit of armour, and grasping in its extended fist a truncheon, reminding me of the ghost of Hamlet's father. In the remaining corner stood another lay figure, which was covered with a large mass of crimson drapery, apparently to protect it from the dust. All about the room, wherever space permitted, were piled fragments of old armour, with swords, pistols, halberts, and other weapons in picturesque disarray.

After showing me several of his paintings, which were not indeed works of very high merit, M. Verrier asked me if I would take a cup of coffee. I assented, and he rang a small handbell.

In response to the summons a young lady entered, bearing black coffee and cigarettes upon a small tray. A thrill of delightful surprise ran through me as I recognised in her the unknown one whose beauty had so profoundly impressed me on that memorable morning.

I trembled all over; I grew hot and cold by turns, and vainly endeavoured to suppress my agitation. Whether M. Verrier noticed my embarrassment or not I cannot say. To my great gratification he introduced me.

"Permit me," said he—"Monsieur Clayton, my daughter, Mademoiselle Annette Verrier."

I bowed, and the young lady returned my obeisance with consummate grace, blushing slightly as she did so. Then she withdrew, after handing us our coffee and cigarettes.

I prolonged my visit rather inordinately, in the hope that Mdlle. Verrier would reappear, but she did not, and I took my leave at length, resolved to use every means for becoming better acquainted with her.

One day I met M. Verrier in the café, as before, and our conversation happened to turn upon games. I mentioned that I was fond of *écarté*, and asked him if he ever played.

"Alas! not now, monsieur," replied he, "for you see I have to be at work every hour of the daylight;

and my physician does not permit that I go out in the evening on account of my asthma, so I am obliged to give up my game."

"But surely, monsieur," said I, "your friends might play with you in your rooms?"

"I have no friends," said he, "who care to spend their time in amusing an old man. Ah, no! most persons can find more lively diversions than that. No matter; I must not complain, for I have a treasure indeed in the society of my beloved daughter."

I hinted pretty strongly that I at least would be only too happy to play with him.

"Well, then, monsieur," said he, "since you are so good as to say so, if you will name any evening that shall be agreeable to you, it will give me great pleasure to take a hand with you."

I suggested the same evening, at any hour he pleased.

"Shall we say nine o' clock then," said he. "And if you will do me the honour to sup with me?"

I accepted gladly, and overwhelmed him with a profusion of thanks. What happiness! I should see Annette—should converse with her, and should be able to strengthen the favourable impression I already believed myself to have made.

M. Verrier rose to leave the café, muttering in a half-audible tone as he did so: "I must remember to get some cards, for I have not a pack—so long since I have played!"

"Pray do not trouble yourself, monsieur," I exclaimed, "for, as it happens, I have two new packs at my hotel."

He thanked me and walked out. Just then the proprietor of the café, a fat jovial fellow, who had been removing some glasses near us during our conversation, turned to me with a smile:

"Monsieur must be rich to play with M. Verrier."

"Indeed?"

"Aye. For it is his humour to play high. Also it is his humour to win."

What did I care for that? Even if I lost a few louis, the interview with Annette would more than repay the sacrifice.

The time came, and on my arrival I was ushered by my host into a small and barely-furnished room, where a table was laid for two.

Our supper was very simple; it consisted of bread, cheese, and salad, with red wine. Annette attended upon us, mixing our salad and pouring out our wine.

She was paler than usual, and the absence of colour in her cheek rather served to heighten the indescribable air of *noblesse* that pervaded all her movements.

I now had to submit to a disappointment for which I had been wholly unprepared. Holding out her hand to me she wished me *bon soir*. She was going to retire for the rest of the evening.

It might have been partly owing to the wine, but I felt unusually bold, and as I took the lily hand in my own I pressed it to my lips.

"So kind of you," she murmured softly.

"She is an angel!" I said to myself, "an angel of gentleness and filial affection. She has no thought for herself; she only studies her father's happiness."

She turned to go and—I hardly knew how I nerved myself to say it—I wondered at my own temerity afterwards:

"You are quitting my sight, mademoiselle," I exclaimed, in impassioned tones, "but your image will remain enshrined in my heart for ever."

M. Verrier blew a long cloud of smoke from his lips as I uttered this speech. He was sitting with his head thrown back, gazing abstractedly at the ceiling, and he never changed his posture as his daughter retired from the room.

An interval of silence then ensued.

"Come, then, monsieur," said M. Verrier at length, "shall we play?"

I assented, and he led the way to the studio. Everything there was precisely as I had seen it on the previous occasion. M. Verrier motioned me to a chair, where I seated myself facing the easel, which was covered with a large white wrapper. Behind it loomed the mysterious figure in armour, while the Apollo was on my right and the skeleton on my left. M. Verrier now removed the wrapper from the easel, disclosing to my view an unfinished sketch, in oils, of his daughter Annette.

I have said that he was a painter of little ability, and the work before me was either by another hand, or the subject had inspired the artist to put forth unwonted power. It was true to the life.

As I gazed at the portrait, a few incoherent expressions of admiration broke from me. M. Verrier smiled, and drawing up a small table towards me, placed wine and glasses upon it, and took his seat facing me.

The game commenced; we played high, and I seemed to lose about three hundred francs in no time. I was a good player, but I did not pay sufficient attention to the cards, partly from a desire to indulge my opponent in his humour, but chiefly because my thoughts were running on Annette, and my eyes continually wandering to her portrait upon the easel.

M. Verrier gathered up my stake with the cool indifference of the veteran gamester.

"It is better to play thus than in company, where they bet upon the cards and advise you what to play, is it not, monsieur?" said he.

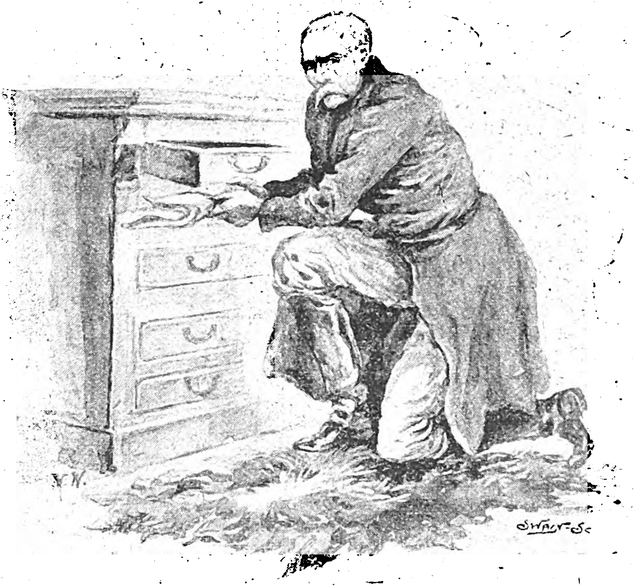
I expressed concurrence; but there was something in his tone that I did not like. It seemed to convey a covert sneer at my want of skill, and I determined to play my very best.

I now won a few games, and M. Verrier for the first time challenged me to bet. I did so, and lost heavily. The artist played as if he had known every card in my hand, a species of knowledge that is of transcendent value at *écarté*. I began to suspect that I was being made the victim of some trickery, though of what nature I could not guess. The cards I had brought with me, and it was therefore impossible that the backs could have been marked in any way. What was the secret of M. Verrier's success? I resolved to watch him, and, if possible, find out.

My hand consisted of the queen, eight, and seven of clubs, and the knave and nine of diamonds. In taking up these cards I had scarcely made a movement of the elbow, and yet I could see in the spectacle glasses of M. Verrier, the reflection of something in brisk motion behind my chair.

Angry and suspicious, and almost forgetting for the moment that the man before me was the father of Annette, I turned sharply round, and was just in time to catch sight of a human hand, holding five cards spread fan-wise, rapidly disappearing under the folds of the crimson drapery that covered the figure in the corner behind me. I had seen the faces of the cards. They were the queen, eight and seven of clubs, and the knave and nine of diamonds.

I roughly tore off the drapery, and disclosed to view, not a lay figure, but the majestic form of Mdlle. Annette Verrier, holding in her hand the cards with which she had been telegraphing. Mary Bryan.



A SERVICE OF LOVE.

IT was just dusk, and St. Petersburg was a blaze of light! This was the Tsar's birthday.

From a hundred steeples the high, clear bells rang out over the city a jangle of congratulations and joy to the Imperial chief, and it would seem that another year to the Tsar's life was a blessing for universal rejoicing. So it would seem from the crowds, and the fireworks, and the bells, but in the faces of knots of people gathered here and there the bitter truth could be read, only half suppressed. There was one in particular whose appearance attracted more attention and comment than he was aware of, or he might have lowered his eyes to hide their scorn when the Imperial party, surrounded by armed cavalry, moved slowly on to the palace.

He stood on the steps at the base of a monument, and with folded arms and knitted brow looked gloomily over the throng at the slow-moving pageant. His face was swarthy, the features well cut, the eyes bright, intellectual, and passionate; he was about medium height, broadly built, and looked not more than thirty-five or so, but his coarse, closely-cropped hair was white. He looked what he was—a man of wonderful determination, powerful energy, untiring purpose, strong passions, and with a strange history in the background.

As he stood there he made, unconsciously, a picture that the most idle and careless passer-by would have speculated about; his individuality was so great he did not even lose it in a crowd. What problem was he trying to solve? A knotted one, truly—the problem of the wretched lives passed by the poor people of his native land! Was the light ever coming? Ah, the night was still dark, with no streaks on the horizon giving promise of a glorious dawn. He shuddered at his own thoughts—for himself he felt no fear, but for the cause to which he had given the best years of his life, and in which he had centred every hope that dared to quiver in a heart, he had long since believed hopeless!

"Karamsin, Karamsin, come down! Don't you see that the people are moving away?" asked a young man, gaining his side and speaking in a cheery voice. "Come down from your pedestal. You look like Alexander sighing for more worlds to conquer."

Karamsin looked up abstractedly, and saw that the crowds were pressing on after the lights and music afar ahead. He looked for a moment up into the darkening sky before moving towards the quieter squares.

"Are you praying, Karamsin?" asked his companion, with a short laugh. "Our work needs no prayer. We can get along without heaven."

"You blame heaven? The fault is of the earth."

"Heaven appointed kings to crush the populace, and made the extremes of poverty and wealth."

"Hush, Sergius, I hate to hear you talk like that! You are too young to be so bitter. Heaven made kings, but their own sin made them tyrants. God is just, it is said. All we want is justice."

"Yes," said the other, with a sneer on his boyish face, "and we must take it, right or wrong, if it entails every sin in the Decalogue."

This conversation was carried on in earnest whispers as they walked rapidly along, and Karamsin's face was pale with suffering.

"You go to Kamenka to-night?" asked Sergius.

"To-night. I leave the work here under your directions and that of the Countess Sumaroff."

"You place a great deal of faith in her. You see a great deal of her," said Sergius thoughtfully. "I cannot help thinking of your superstition—that women were fatal to the men of your race. Are you not afraid, or do you ever think of that now?"

Karamsin's dark cheek flushed and a deeper gloom settled on his face.

"I can never forget. To women I owe every misfortune I have met with. But while I stay a friend, I am safe. I will never love again. That is past. My heart is a veritable cinder."

"Oh, then it is only friendship you feel for the beautiful Countess?" asked the other drily.

"That is all."

They had reached a house in a quiet street, with a small paved court in front of it. The first floor appeared to be a shop, in whose windows a gunsmith's stock was displayed, although the doors were closed and shuttered, owing to the holiday. Here they separated, and Karamsin entered the house. At the back of the supposed gun shop were two or three rooms barely furnished, and not even the neighbours knew that here were held some of the most formidable Nihilistic meetings in all Russia, so secretly were they conducted. Karamsin only glanced round and mounted to the floor above.

The rooms here were more comfortably furnished, one in particular, overlooking the street, gave evidence of a refined taste, for the curtains at the windows were rich and subdued in colours, a wood fire burnt on the hearth, with a bear skin stretched before it, and two tall silver candlesticks holding newly-lighted candles were standing on the table, where dinner was laid for one.

A middle-aged serving woman entered with the dinner on a tray, and waited humbly for a greeting.

"Did anyone call while I was out, Catharine?" he asked.

"One gentleman, master. He wanted to see some guns. I told him he must come to-morrow, as this was a holiday. He was very impatient, and I could scarcely prevent him from coming up to wait for you."

Karamsin leant forward, an excited glow in his dark eyes, his long brown hands clenched fiercely.

"Ah—ah! And what did this strange, impatient man look like? Describe him."

The woman paused thoughtfully.

"He was very stout—thick—short. A bullet black head and long moustache."

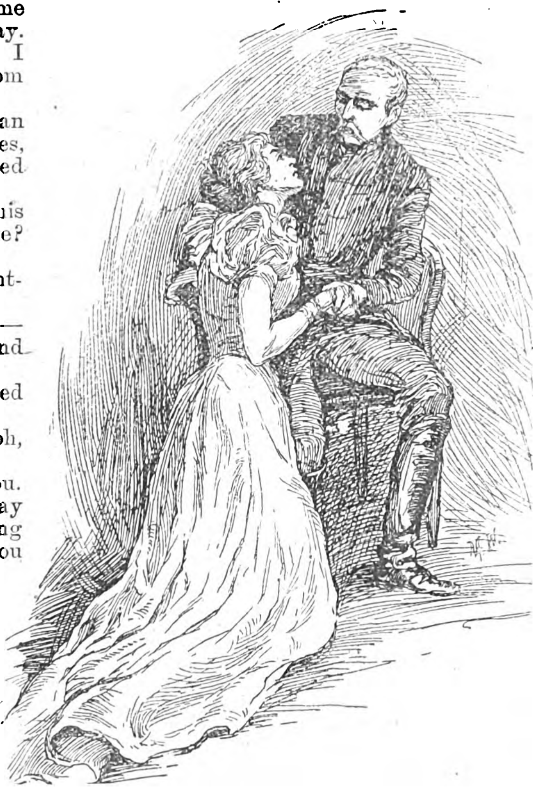
"Small eyes?" questioned Karamsin eagerly.

"Yes, and a loud voice—oh, a very loud, master."

"I know him. Thank you. That will do. I am going away to-night," he said, after drinking a glass of wine, "and I want you to pack me a few changes of linen. I must be off at once."

When he was again alone he began to pace the room excitedly.

"It has come at last," he thought. "The investigation is a matter of time now, for General Letraski is a bloodhound. I must be careful; very, very careful. Am I guilty? Is it treason to labour for equity and justice, to follow only the laws of pure humanity? Yet according to the last imperial decree I can be exiled to Siberia for this offence. But I cannot wait and face it all. Everything depends on my presence in Kamenka to-morrow, for if I fail and the people once lose faith in me my hold on them will be destroyed—yes, I must go!"



Then, kneeling beside him, she rested her head against his shoulder.

The clock struck nine and Karamsin shook off his thoughtful mood. He took from a small drawer in a cabinet a package of papers, tied with a stout string. If found they would convict him hopelesssly, but, if destroyed, there was comparatively small chance of his defeat, so well arranged were all his plans and schemes. The most important item in his life was that package of papers. He wanted to be rid of it, for it was dangerous; he wanted to keep it, for it was valuable. Better to be on the safe side. Any hour, any moment, might see him in a difficult position, and the possession of these papers meant a sentence to something infinitely worse than death.

He knelt down before the fire and untied one knot of the string, when he lifted his head suddenly and listened intently. Wait—something was astir! He heard a sound in the silent house which drove the blood in torrents to his heart, until it seemed that it would fail under the rapid, excited rush. It was a woman's soft, musical voice, and one he knew well.

Staggering to his feet he threw the package on the table, but did not notice that it fell beside another which contained only an account of insignificant business details.

With fixed eyes he watched the door, waiting for an explanation of the voice. After a moment, which seemed interminable, the *portière* was drawn aside by a white hand, and a woman's face appeared at the opening. She entered and crossed rapidly and silently to his side, holding out both her hands. Karamsin looked at her, and all his heart was in his eyes. If he ever doubted before that he loved her he knew the truth now.

Now—when she had risked compromising herself, when her lovely face was white and drawn with pain, and her long, white-lidded dark blue eyes, heavy with passionate sorrow, fell under his gaze. With gentle fingers he unfastened the long fur cloak which covered her, and saw that she was in a court ball dress of white, clinging crêpe, diamonds at her throat and wrists and hair. She was as beautiful as a dream, and the magnetism of her presence thrilled through him with bewildering sweetness and confusion. Laying her hand on his arm, she pushed him gently into a chair, then kneeling beside him, rested her head against his shoulder.

"Do you despise me for coming?" Countess Zumaroff asked in a voice that was broken and very wistful. "It ——"

"My dear Countess," interrupted Karamsin earnestly, lifting her hand and kissing it reverently, "you can never be aught to me but the best and most beautiful of women. I do not question what has brought you here to-night. The reason, I know, will be sufficiently strong to outbalance the imprudence."

The woman beside him thrilled under his words and glance, but she was ill at ease and the colour came and went in her face painfully.

At last, with sudden strength, she met his eyes steadily.

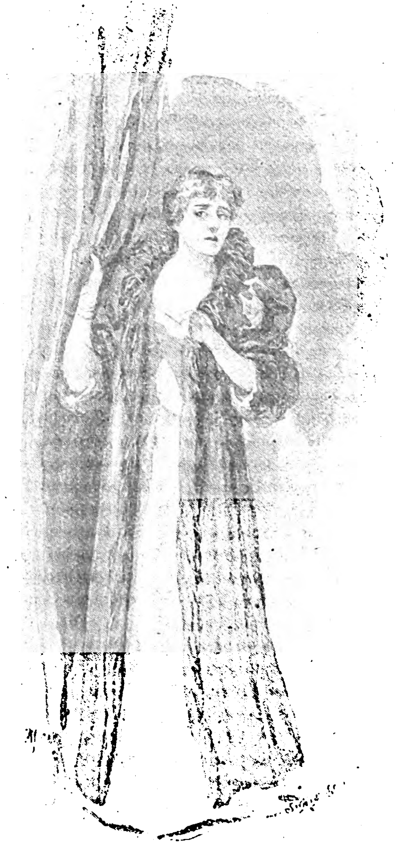
"I came to say good-bye to you. That was all. I had to come," she said rapidly. "I knew you were going away on a dangerous journey—even more dangerous than you think—and I have overcome every obstacle to see you once before you go!"

The rest of the story was told in her face—in the languid, beseeching eyes and tremulous mouth.

Her face was dangerously near—he loved her—love looked from her eyes to his. Karamsin forgot everything, and, lowering his face, as if drawn down by a spell, he kissed her on the mouth.

"And do you love me? I never dreamt it," he whispered. "And yet your love, coming at this time, gives me no happiness, although I love you with my whole heart. It seems a strange thing to say, but my heart is the heavier for it, and I feel on the brink of a tragedy."

"But we Russians mingle sadness with everything," she said, smiling in his face. "We are sad in our poetry, in our music; we take life *au grand sérieux.* But we are saddest of all in our loves, when we love truly. A German writer has said of our songs that they are 'the sorrows of whole centuries blended in one everlasting sigh.'"



Countess Zumaroff stepped out.

"You are so different from other women I have known—will you be the same?" He paused and looked at the clock. It was after ten, and long past the time when he should have started on his journey.

"My blessing or my curse?" he said aloud, but speaking to himself. He said no more—the words froze on his lips—the Countess' eyes looked into his in silent, questioning horror. There were footsteps in the quiet street—not the footsteps of one man, but of a number, and the authoritative knock sounded on the street door. In that moment of terror, scarcely knowing what she did, the Countess blew out both candles, and the room was lit only by the firelight.

Karamsin drew aside the hangings, which covered a deep recess in the room, and beckoned to her to hide behind them.

"Let nothing tempt you to betray yourself," he whispered. There was another knock at the door, which made the house shake, and Catharine came into the room in *deshabillée*, her old face pale and scared.

"Master, what shall I do?"

"Open the door, of course," he replied coolly.

She went away, her teeth chattering with nervousness, and in that instant he remembered the papers. It was too late to burn them. What should he do? The men were in the hall. He must go down and detain them for a few moments.

"Countess," he whispered from the door, "take the package of papers from the table and hide them in your bosom. Quick! I will detain them below."

She darted out, picked up the package, which the uncertain firelight showed her, and was back in a second, pressing it down on her heart. She heard Karamsin descend the stairs and his clear, composed voice ask the meaning of the intrusion.

"We want to see you," was the curt answer, and she recognised General Letraski's voice.

"If it is a matter of business," replied Karamsin, "it can be conducted best in my store. Will you follow me?"

"One moment, my friend. The matter in hand has nothing to do with guns—unless you drive us to an extremity—and we prefer to make ourselves at home. Let us be comfortable at all hazards."

In another moment they entered the room where the Countess was concealed. There were four of them—the Chief of Police, two of his assistants, and Letraski. The candles were relit, and Letraski's quick eye fell at once on the papers lying on the table. He picked them up, while Karamsin turned ashy pale, though retaining his composure. Had not the Countess secreted the papers, or were there two packages? With those papers in Letraski's possession and he aware of their contents all was lost. The string had not yet been untied, and Karamsin held out his hand.

"General Letraski, those papers have no interest for you at all. Give them to me, if you please!"

But Letraski had noticed the pallour of his face and drawn his own conclusions.

"If they prove to be a will, a bundle of love-letters, or original poetry, I will return them at once," said Letraski jestingly, with his eye-glass raised. "You do not object to my glancing at them?"

"I do most emphatically object! You are at liberty to ask for an interview, and I am disposed to grant it, but the examination of my private papers is a different matter!"

"Chief, show your warrant!" said Letraski shortly. "Ah! You see I can examine every crevice in your room, open every drawer and box! Now, don't get excited! Will you kindly stand round him, my men, while I examine these documents."

It was a terrible pause as Letraski read on with ominously drawn brows, and at last he spoke:

"Arrest him! Karamsin, you are a Nihilist! You are the head of the Nihilists! Arrest him, my men, in the name of the Tsar!"

The words had scarcely left his lips when the *portière* was drawn aside and the Countess Zumaroff stepped out, with terrible anguish marking her beautiful face. Letraski could scarcely believe his eyes! She loved Karamsin—she, the acknowledged beauty of the Court! Who would have guessed it?

What a scandal this would be for Russia's nobility to lift its brows over!

With a long, imploring gaze she laid her hand on Letraski's arm. For a moment she could not speak, and he waited considerately until she recovered her composure somewhat.

"Letraski, we have been friends for years. My husband, until his death, was your faithful friend. You are a gentleman, and I am sure you have a heart! Will you grant me one request?"

"If I can. If it does not involve treason, Countess. I am in the service of the Tsar," he replied, with unusual gentleness.

"But it does involve what you call treason," she said with fierce earnestness, "and it saves the man I love from a terrible fate, me from disgrace and extinction! Look you, if you burn those papers before my eyes and promise me, all of you, never to reveal the incidents of this night, I will divide amongst you my whole fortune—every rouble! Leave us poor, but free! We will go away to some other land and live or die together!"

Karamsin's heart bled to see her there, pleading for him. Letraski was moved, too, but replied without hesitation:

"Countess, what you say is madness! I cannot do it. Do not cling to me so; do not make it so hard to refuse you! Your name will not be mentioned, have no fear of that. But the prisoner and papers belong to the Government."

"If there is any guilt, it is mine as much as his! Tell him, Karamsin, that I have been your ally in everything. I will go with you!"

"Women are the playthings of the devil!" said Letraski impatiently. "I can in no other way explain the extraordinary positions in which they manage to place themselves."

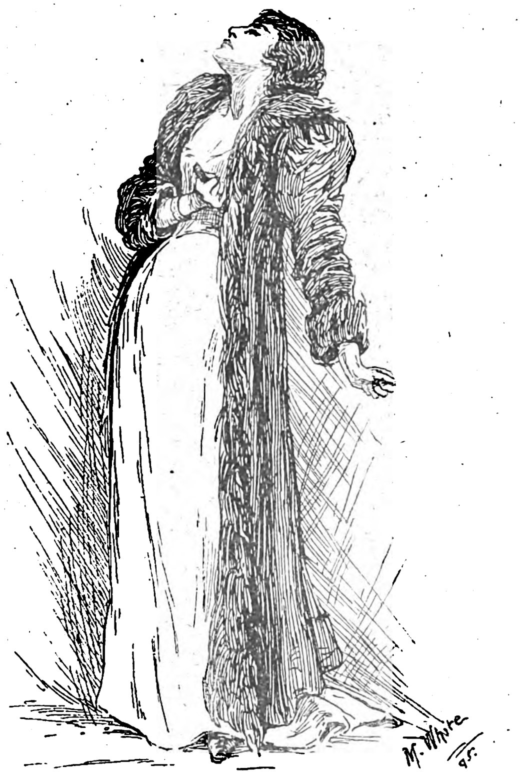
"This woman is an angel," said Karamsin, as his miserable eyes rested on her white face.

She looked up wearily and met that gaze.

"You can still say that? Although it was my visit which prevented you from undertaking the journey that would have saved you, and though, in my haste, I secreted the wrong papers! You are more than generous!"

No pleading came to her lips now! Instead, there was utter hopelessness in her attitude and words.

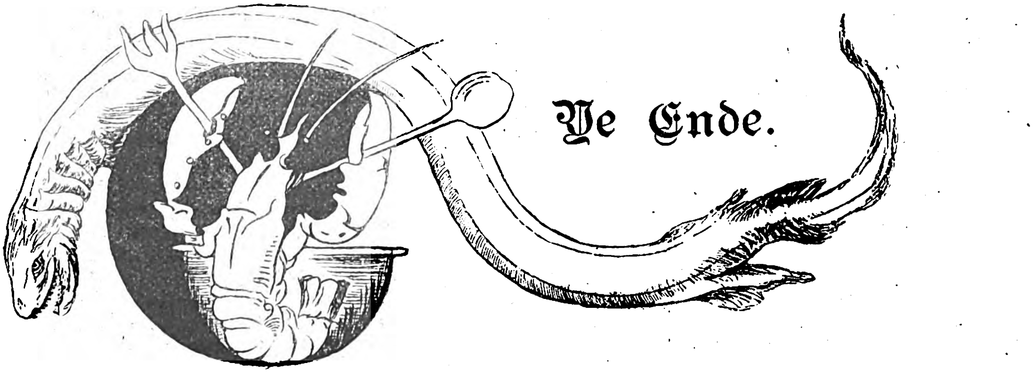
"Do you remember telling me once that women were fatal to men of your race? How I pitied you that day! I have been fatal to you! Oh, God—see, your last, crowning wretchedness—your death, or the long Siberian exile, worse than death, has come to you through a woman—who—who loved you too well to live, remembering that she killed you, when she would have suffered anything to save you."



Buried it in her heart.

These were the last words she spoke. Before one of the men guessed her motive she had taken swiftly from the folds of her dress a long, narrow dagger, and tearing apart the gauze covering her bosom, buried it in her heart. Karamsin's passionate kisses could not check the soul's flight. The beautiful lips froze into the set lines of death even as he kissed them. He looked down at her in heart-broken silence—dead at his feet, a sacrifice to the fatality which had ever followed him.

E. Garnet.



LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

No. 4.—The Suicide of Pickles.

THE old cattleman leant back in his chair and poised between scornful fingers the last chapter of a cigar.

"No, son, I never did no killin' myself, but I've stood round and seed folks get checked clear through, which is more profitable. I calls to mind a killin' down to old Ike Stockton's.

"There was a big crowd at Stockton's that June day. The corrals was full of packmules, an' bull teams, an' waggon trains from the East, an' white men, Mexicans, half-breeds, an' Injuns was a-mixin' an' meanderin' round, a-lyin' an' a-laughin', an' a-drinkin' old Ike's whiskey mighty profuse.

"Four or five mule-skinners had their long, limber sixteen-foot whips, which are loaded with dust shot from butt to tip, an' was a crackin' of 'em at a mark. I've seen one of 'em, with the most easy, delicate, deliberate twist of the wrist, make his whip squirm in the air like a hurt snake, an' all at wonst straighten it out with the crack of twenty rifles, an' the buckskin popper would cut a hole in a loose buffalo robe he'd hung up, an' all without even investin' two ounces of actooal strength. Several of us was a-lookin' on from the hotel porch, applaudin' of the good shots, when Short Creek Dave speaks up to Jack Moore next to me an' says:

"'Jack, you mind that old Navajo you downed over on the San Simon last fall?'

"'I minds it mighty clear,' says Jack. 'He was a-stealin' my hoss at the time, an' I kin prove it by his skelp on my bridle right now.'

"'Well,' says Short Creek Dave, pointin' to a dirty saddle-coloured halfbreed who was makin' himself pretty numerous, 'that feller they calls Pickles is his nephfy, an' you wants to look a whole lot, for I've heard him allow that the killin' of his uncle was mighty rank, an' he didn't like it no how.'

"'That's all right,' says Jack, 'Pickles an' me has been watchin' each other for an hour, an' I'll tell you alls private, if he goes to play hoss a little bit, he an' his uncle will be able to talk things before night.'

"Bimeby Pickles comes along where we are.

"'Hellow Jack,' he says, 'been makin' it smoky down in the San Simon lately?'

"'No, not since last fall,' says Jack, 'an' now I thinks of it, I see that old Navajo hoss thief of an uncle of yours when I was down there last. I ain't met him lately though. Where do you reckon he's done loped to?'

"'Can't say myself,' says Pickles, with a wicked cheerfulness, 'our family had a reunion over on Bear Creek last spring, an' I couldn't count his nose among 'em no how. Mebby he had an engagement an' couldn't git there. Mebby he's out sloshin' 'round in the high grass some'ers now. Great man to go 'round permiscus, that Injun was.'

"'You see,' says Jack, 'I didn't know but he might be dead, because the time I was 'ludin' to I was settin' in camp one day an' happens to look up, an' thar was my hoss, Alazan, with a perfect stranger on him. Alazan was a-pitchin' an' a-buckin' an' a-cavortin' quite frightful, an' looked like he was goin' to cripple that stranger shore. Well, you know me. I'd rather lose two horses than have a man I didn't know git hurt, so I grabs my Winchester an' allows to kill Alazan.

"'But it was a new gun, an' you know what new sights is—coarse as sandburrs—an' I holds too high, an' I ketches the stranger, bang! right back of his left y'ear, an' the bullet comes outen his right y'ear. I never was so displeased with my shootin' for ten years. The idea of me holdin' four foot too high in a hundred yards. I was so plumb disgusted an' 'shamed I never went near the stranger till after I'd finished my grub.

"'Alazan, he came up all shiverin' an' sweatin', an' stood there, an' in an hour or so I walked out to the remains, an' when I seed 'em they was nuthin' but an old digger Injun. You kin drink on it, I was relieved. Bein' a no account Injun, of course, I didn't paw him over much for brands, but it struck me at the time it was mighty likely to be your uncle. This old cuss' skelp is over on my bridle, if you think you'd know it!'

"'Oh, no,' says Pickles, mighty onconsarned, 'it couldn't be my uncle, no how. If it was one of my family it would have been your ha'r on his bridle, so it must have been some old shorthorn of a Mohave you seed. Well, let's all take a drink on it.'

"So we all went in for our whiskey, Jack and Pickles watchin' each other mighty close, an' all the rest of us on the keevee, as the French say, to hop outen range if they took to shootin'.

"'Well,' says Pickles, as he secreted his nose paint, 'I must saddle and git out of here. I want to see Enright, an' I don't reckon I'll find the old Pinto this side o' Prescott, either. When do you think you'll leave yourself, Jack?'

"'I don't put it up I'll leave for a long time,' says Jack, 'mebby not for a month, so don't go to makin' any friendly wait for me nowhar on the trail, Pickles, 'cause you'd most likely run out of water or somethin' before I got along.'

"Bimeby, Pickles, he gets saddled up an' comes chargin' 'round on his little buckskin hoss, cuttin' all manner of tricks, reachin' for things on the ground, snatchin' off Mexicans' hats, an' jumpin' his pony over waggon-tongues, an' camp fixin's, all the time a-whoopin' an' yellin', an' havin' a high old time all by himself. You could see he was a-gettin' up his blood an' nerve reg'lar Injun fashion.

"Pretty soon he takes down his rope an' goes to whirlin' that. Two or three times he comes flashin' by whar we were, an' I look for to see him make a try for Jack.

"But he was too far back, or too many 'round him, or Pickles couldn't get his hoss' step, or somethin'; for he didn't throw it out, but just kept yellin' an' ridin' louder an' faster every minute. About this time Stockton came out from his bar-room.

"'Look here, Pickles,' he says, 'I've jest told three of my men to shoot you up a whole lot if you go to pitch that rope jest once; an' they're goin' to do it. Bein' as the news concarned you personal, I allowed it wasn't nothin' more than friendly to tell you. Then agin I don't like to lose a good customer like you till I has to, no how.'

"So old Ike he goes back to his bar-room, an' Pickles gits down an' leaves his hoss standin' an' comes back up to the porch.

"'Do you know, Jack,' he says, 'I don't like the onrespeckful way you talks of Injuns. I'm Injun part myself an' I don't like it.'

"'No?' says Jack, 'I s'pose that's a fact, too. An' yet, Pickles, not intendin' nothin' personal at all, for I wouldn't be personal with a horned toad, I'm not only onrespeckful of an Injun, an' thinks the Guv'ment oughter pay a bounty for their skelps, but I states a belief that a mean, ornery, mud-blooded, sneakin', hoss-stealin' mongrel of a half-breed is lower yet, I holdin' he ain't even people, ain't nothin', in fact. But to change the subjeck, as well as open an avenoo for another round of drinks, I'll bet you, Pickles, you stole that hoss down thar, an' that the "7 K" brand on his shoulder ain't no brand at all, but jest picked on thar with the point of a knife.'

"When Jack puts it all over Pickles this way we looked for some shootin' shore. But Pickles couldn't steady himself on the pinch. He was jest like lots of ponies I've seed. He'd ride right at a thing as though he was goin' clean through or over, an' jest the last second he'd shy, an' flinch, an' weaken. The fact is, son, it wasn't Pickles' fault. There ain't any breed of man on earth but the pure white as will play a desperate deal clean through an' call the turn for life or death at the close; an', of course, Pickles was only half white. So he laughed kind of ugly at Jack's bluff, an' 'lowed he'd order drinks without no bettin'.

"'An' then, Jack,' he says to him, 'I want you to take dinner with me. I'll have Ike git us up somethin' right away now.'

"'I'll go you,' says Jack, all cheerful enough, 'whatever it be.'

"'I'll fix you people up a feed,' says old Ike, 'but you can't do your feedin' in no dinin'-room of mine. I'll fix it over in the camp house, t'other side of the corral, an' you kin be jest as sociable as you please. There won't be nuthin' nor nobody for you to hurt or disturb over there.'

"After a little their grub was got ready in the camp house, an' Jack an' Pickles walks over side an' side. They goes in an' shuts the door, an' in about five minutes bang! bang! goes two six-shooters, an' we all canters over, an' finds Jack eatin' away all right, an' Pickles over the other side with his head in his tin plate, clear stark dead.

"'It don't look like Pickles was hungry much after all,' says Jack.

"They'd been pulled their guns as they sat down an' put 'em in their laps, but jest as I say, Pickles couldn't stand the pressure, an' gittin' nervous he grabbed for his gun, an' as he went to git it up the muzzle caught under the table top an' thar his bullet was all safe in the wood. Jack bein' clean strain had better luck.

"Finally Cherokee Hall gits up an' says: 'This here killin' was all right, but there bein' some present difficulty of givin' the reasons why it's all right, an', owin', as we do a dooty to the public, I moves you that our verdict be 'justified homicide' based on the ground that Pickles commits suicide.'

"This was good enough. Of course, Pickles didn't commit suicide none, but that didn't hurt it for a reason jest the same."

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SELF ACCUSED.

A GOOD many years ago now I had occasion to visit Holyhead, on business, which I understood from my employer, a land and estate agent, would probably necessitate my staying there for the night. So I merely took with me a small portmanteau containing a few necessaries; but shortly after my arrival I learnt that the business I had come to settle had been unavoidably postponed for a day or two, and it would probably be the end of the week before I should be able to get away.

The prospect of a brief holiday was not by any means distasteful to me, but not having brought much money with me I did not feel justified in going to the expense of putting up at an hotel, and so took a look round with a view to finding cheap apartments where, on explaining the circumstances of my having practically no luggage with me, I could find accommodation at a considerably cheaper rate than in an hotel.

I had not gone far from the station when I came upon a row of small residences that might best be described as an admixture between small villas and artisans' cottages, and in the window of one of them I saw the announcement of a combined bed and sitting room to let.

"The very thing," I said to myself, and promptly knocked at the door, which was opened by a respectable looking woman rejoicing, as I afterwards discovered, in the name of Roberts, to whom I explained the state of affairs; and that, although my stay might not be prolonged beyond a few days, it might extend to a week, and if she could very kindly take me in I should be exceedingly obliged to her.

This she good-naturedly consented to do, and in a few minutes I had arranged as to terms, which were exceedingly moderate, and had taken possession of the rooms allotted to me.

"I dare say you'd be liking something to eat, sir, after your journey?"

"I should indeed, Mrs. Roberts, if you could manage it," I replied.

"Well, I have not got anything in the house, but I'll run out, and it shall be ready in less than an hour."

Left to myself I took stock of my surroundings, and then sat down to run my eye over a story I had been writing, the finishing touches to which I had put in the train to while away the time on my long journey up North. I was soon busily engaged in making a few corrections and alterations, reading the story out loud to myself, as has always been my habit, to see how it sounded.

I had become so engrossed in my occupation that I did not notice the door open, and when Mrs. Roberts said: "Your tea is ready, sir," without thinking what I was saying, I replied: "John Wilson, at your service, madam," that being the sentence in my story I was just in the middle of. And then, realising where I was, I said: "Thanks, Mrs. Roberts, I am very much obliged to you for taking so much trouble."

"It's no trouble, sir. People who let rooms must do their best to make their lodgers comfortable, I always say. I hope you will find the steak tender, and if you want anything, Mr. Wilson, the bell is close to you," and before I could reply the old lady had gone out and closed the door.

"Wilson!" I said to myself. "Oh, of course, she thought I meant my own name just now," and I laughed at the stupid mistake I had made. "After all, what does it matter, it's only for a day or two, and so there is no need to undeceive her."

Being tired, I went to bed early, and as the next morning was wet, I determined to stay in for an hour or two and finish off my story, whilst I had the leisure to do so quietly.

There was one portion of it, the confession of a murder, which did not altogether satisfy me; it hardly seemed feasible somehow, in the way I had written it, and I determined to do it over again. This did not, however, prove so easy as I had anticipated, and I wrote and rewrote a page or two twice over, before I was satisfied that I had made it as true to life as possible.

The second attempt was certainly better than the first, and both were better than the original, which I destroyed, using one of the other two and keeping the second in case I should see my way to improve upon it later on.

Not that I felt very confident of being able to do so, and as a matter of fact, I neatly tied up the sheets of the story, as written, and having indited a short note to the editor of a London journal to whom I intended to submit my literary effort, put the whole into an envelope, and addressed it, saying to myself, as I placed it on the mantelpiece, I would post it the next day, if no further inspiration came to me in the interval.

With a feeling of relief at having finally accomplished what had taken me a good many hours to do at various odd times, and the rain having left off, I made up my mind to have a look round the town and see what there was to be done in the way of amusing myself during the next few days.

To a stranger, without any friends, or even acquaintances, a provincial town, unlike London, where there is always something going on, does not possess any very attractive features; and I was thinking of falling back upon the ever welcome amusement of a game of billiards, when it suddenly occurred to me that the Irish mail started from Holyhead: and simultaneously the thought suggested itself to my mind that a trip to Dublin by the mail boat would not be at all a bad idea, and I strolled down to the pier to ascertain the time of departure.

The night boat, I found, left at midnight, and if I went by that I should be in Dublin early in the morning, have a day there, and be able to return the same evening; an arrangement which would suit me in every way.

On going back to the house where I was staying, I found Mrs. Roberts had been suddenly called away to see a sick relative, and would not be back until the next day, a neighbour having undertaken to sleep in the house during her absence. Not wishing to give any unnecessary trouble, I said at once I would get some dinner at one of the hotels, and as it happened I had made up my mind to run over to Dublin and should not return until the following night, so that she need not distress herself on my account.

She was profuse in her thanks, and evidently much relieved at not having to minister to my wants and necessities.

"What time shall I tell Mrs. Roberts to expect you back, sir?" were her parting words, and I remember saying in reply, with a laugh. "Oh, sometime or other to-morrow evening; but she had better not expect me till she sees me," meaning to imply that she was not to bother about making any preparation for me. As it happened, however, my harmless remark was taken in a very different sense to what I had intended it to be.

Dinner over, for want of something better to do I strolled down to the pier again, and on finding that a steamer would start almost immediately for the Isle of Man, I decided on making the trip there, instead of to Dublin as I had intended; one place was as new to me as the other, and all I wanted was a short trip somewhere.

In due course I arrived at my destination, and, having secured a bed for the night, I made inquiries as to how I could return to Holyhead on the following day, only to find that the steamer ran but once a week, and that I should have to go back to Liverpool and thence on by train. This did not matter so very much, I argued to myself, as a day in Liverpool would be a pleasant addition to the outing.

I retired to bed early, giving orders to be called at eight o'clock the next morning.

"It can't be seven o'clock yet," I said to myself, as a knock at the door awakened me out of a very comfortable morning sleep, when, to my surprise, the door opened, and not the boots whom I had instructed to call me, but two men, one of them bearing an official-looking document in his hand, made their appearance.

"The game's up, Mr. Wilson," he said, "it's best to take things quietly. I hold here a warrant for your arrest on the charge of wilful murder."

"Wilson! Murder! What on earth do you mean?"

"The less you say the better, if you take my advice. My information is that you have been staying at Holyhead, at the house of a Mrs. Roberts," referring to a telegram he held in his hand, "and that you announced yesterday afternoon that you were going to Dublin by the night mail."

"That is quite correct," I interposed.

"Oh, you admit that?"

"Of course I do, I meant——"

"Best not to say too much, Mr. Wilson."

"But my name is not Wilson at all, that's where you are mistaken."

"It says in this telegram, 'gave the name of John Wilson.'"

In an instant the truth flashed upon me, and I inwardly cursed myself for my stupidity in not explaining the slip of the tongue I had unconsciously committed to Mrs. Roberts; and then the murder! why, of course, the villain in my story was called John Wilson, and the woman in charge must have come across one of the discarded sheets on which I had written out the fellow's confession, imagined it was real—as if any sane man would have left lying about such incriminating evidence—had given information to the local police, and there you are!

All this passed through my mind in much less time than it has taken me to write it down, and I could not resist bursting out laughing.

"This is no laughing matter, I can tell you," said the detective, for such he was, I discovered. "I shall be obliged if you will be good enough to dress yourself with as little delay as possible. My instructions are to convey you to Holyhead with all practicable dispatch, and as the steamer for Liverpool starts in less than half an hour, and I have a cab in readiness, we can just do it if you will be good enough to hurry yourself a little."

There was something in the man's manner that seemed to imply he was not in the mood for standing nonsense, and I realised that he would probably not give credence to my explanation, even were I to tender it, for I had not a shred of evidence to support it; and there was the fact, easily explainable of course under ordinary circumstances, that I had given out I was going to Dublin, and here I was in the Isle of Man.

The only thing to be done was to get back to Holyhead as soon as possible, when the mystery would be at once cleared up. I congratulated myself now that I had not, as I intended, posted the MS. before I came away.

The return journey was anything but a pleasant one. The two officers were constrained in their manner and conversation, and it was with a genuine feeling of relief that I at length reached my destination.

"And now, gentlemen, when we alight, if you will allow me to go with you to Mrs. Roberts' house, I can, I think, clear up this matter to our mutual satisfaction."

One or two members of the local force were awaiting my arrival, and on the platform, in close proximity to a constable, was the woman who had been deputed as caretaker by Mrs. Roberts.

"That's him, Thomas," she said excitedly, turning to the constable (her husband as I afterwards discovered), "I could swear to him amongst a thousand."

The man addressed seemed to visibly swell with importance.

Just at that moment a superintendent stepped forward.

"You got my wire in time, I see."

"Yes, sir; the prisoner says if he can be allowed access to the room he occupied at Mrs. Roberts' he will be able to explain things. I suppose there will be no objection to his doing so—under escort, of course."

"I see no reason why he should not. I myself will accompany you."

The four of us were soon in a cab, and in a few minutes the driver had stopped at Mrs. Roberts' door, which was opened by that worthy individual herself.

"Dear, dear, only to think that I should have harboured such a willain! Why, I might have been murdered in my bed."

"Not quite so bad as that, Mrs. Roberts, I hope," I said cheerfully, at the same time entering the house, one of the officers preceeding me and the other two bringing up the rear.

"Into the parlour, please—and now, gentlemen, I think I can explain."

I looked at the mantelpiece. Good Heavens! the packet was not where I had left it. Things were assuming an awkward turn.

"The papers I left on the mantelpiece, Mrs. Roberts," I managed to gasp out.

"Do you mean the envelope, sir?" she inquired.

"Yes, yes, a long blue one."

"The lady as kindly took charge of the 'ouse for me, seeing as it was stamped, ready for post, thought it best to send it off, thinking as 'ow you 'ad forgotten it."

"Well, sir, what explanation have you to offer now you *have* brought us here?" asked the superintendent sarcastically.

I briefly told him the facts of the case, but I saw he did not believe me for all that.

"A very improbable story," was his dry comment.

"Well, at any rate you will do me the justice of wiring to the editor in London to see whether what I have said is true or not."

"Yes, we can do that, of course, but——"

He did not conclude the sentence, and I could see he did not believe a word I had said, and I was forthwith escorted to the Town Hall and placed under careful supervision.

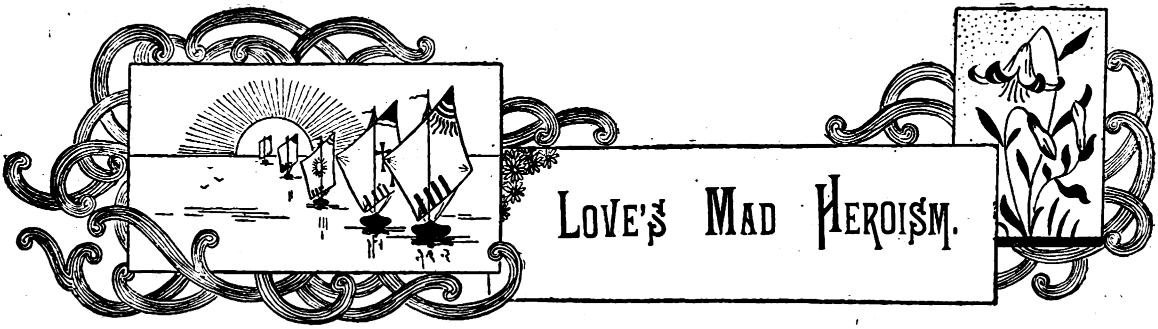
* * * * *

Of course, a reply was received in due course, and the next morning my luckless story came back by post, and I was speedily released from custody. But it taught me a lesson not to leave my writings about.

It seems on going into the room after I had left, the constable's wife happened to pick up the sheet of paper on which I had written, and which I had thrown aside as not being thrilling enough, the confession of murder of a man unknown, by the villain of my story—John Wilson—and had conveyed the astounding information to her husband, who thought he had lighted upon a mystery, the unravelment of which would not only redound to his credit, but probably result in his speedy promotion. And really, when I read it over afterwards, it was so graphically written (excuse the egotism, please) that his being taken in by it was perfectly excusable.

How he watched to see if I did really go by the Dublin boat, and when he found I did not, set to and made inquiries, with the result that he speedily discovered that, as he feared, I had given him the slip, and how he promptly wired to the Isle of Man authorities to look out for and arrest me, he told me afterwards, in confidence, and not without a sigh of regret at the downfall of his hopes of promotion.

S. J. F. Newbery.



LOVE'S MAD HEROISM.

AL-ARAF, the singular name which my friend Sidney Acton had chosen for his estate, a charming property overlooking the Conestoga, near the railway bridge, had always been a mystery to me. I had a notion of the meaning of the phrase, but how it came to be applied to a pretty modern villa, surrounded by tasteful grounds, and occupied by a respectable gentleman and his lovely wife, was a problem I could not solve.

After turning the matter over in my mind for a considerable time without any light, I ventured to ask my host for an explanation, during a visit to the place.

"Is it possible that you have never heard the story?" he said with a smile. "It is incredible, considering how fond I am of relating it to anyone who will listen. Well, in that case, if you will come with me to the brow of the hill opposite the bridge, you shall have the advantage of hearing the drama on the scene of its occurrence, from the mouth of one of the principal actors."

I followed him to the spot indicated, where we seated ourselves upon a rustic bench beneath a clump of sycamores.

"In the first place," he began, "you are aware that Al-Araf is the name the Mohammedans give to their purgatory—a sort of half-way house for departed spirits midway between heaven and hell. Into the latter, a gloomy pit, whence arise continually thunders and roarings like the voice of a thousand waterfalls, the condemned soul is sent with a plunge. Into the other, the true believer is led across a bridge no wider than a hair. You shall presently decide for yourself whether the name I have given to my estate, commemorative of my experience, is apt or not.

"The river at this point, as you perceive, is compressed into a swift, turbid stream, not more than five hundred yards in width, between two steep walls of rock over three hundred feet in height. The bridge, an iron structure supported by two brick piers, springs from the bluffs on either side of the stream where it is narrower. You may discern a little below the roadbed three lines, looking from this point like fine spiders' webs. They are the telegraph wires of the company, resting upon the projecting buttresses of the piers. How would you like attempting to enter heaven over such a bridge as these would make, knowing that the chances were ten to one in favour of your plunging headlong into the whirling water below? Well, if a woman's love be heaven, as the poets tell us it is, I have made my way to it over that very bridge.

"I was an ambitious young lawyer at the period I am speaking of, and as hard a worker as ever entered a plea. Although worn out with the long winter's labour, I gave myself no rest until late in the season. Then I consented to take two weeks' vacation, and came down to spend it at the hotel whose gables you can see through the trees on the opposite bank of the river.

"Most of the guests had already departed, for the cold September storms had set in, and the nights were sharp and blustery; but there was one person remaining whose society proved an ample substitute for the whole gay crowd of pleasure seekers. Need I say it was a lady?

"I thought her then the sweetest woman that ever blessed the sight of man. It must have been right, because my opinion has undergone no change to this day. Young, ardent, and, despite my legal training, inexperienced, I fell madly in love with her at first sight, and made not the slightest attempt to disguise it.

"Nevertheless, I made little or no visible progress with her. She evidently liked me as a friend; she was gentle and gracious, but nothing more. Of course, had I been in a cooler frame of mind I should have understood that under the most favourable circumstances I could expect nothing more after a ten days' acquaintance. But those ten days were to me ten long years of delicious hope and desperate despondency, alternate every half hour of the day and night.

"Sometimes, when she would suddenly raise her eyes and detect my own fixed upon her with a yearning intensity, she would flush slightly and her voice would tremble. Then my heart would cry out exultantly: 'She loves me.' Again it would occur to me that no woman, however cold, could witness the signs of a man's passion for her without some confusion. Then I would curse my own mad folly and drop miles deep into the pit of despair.

"So matters ran on until the end of the fortnight, when one rainy afternoon, as we sat in the porch together, she told me that she was to return to town on the following morning. If she had read my own death warrant instead, I should have borne it more stoically. For a moment I sat mute and bewildered. Going away from me! Returning to the great city, among whose teeming thousands I should perhaps lose her for ever! The thought cut me to the heart like a knife.

"'Oh, do not say that you are going away!' I cried. 'What shall I do?'

"She looked at me with a faint blush deepening upon her cheeks.

"'The season is over,' she replied. 'I have already stayed longer than I intended.'

"'I cannot bear it!' I said impetuously. 'If I cannot see you, be near you always, I do not care to live. Octavia, do you not know that I love you?'

"'You should not talk to me so,' she returned agitatedly. 'You do not mean what you say. We have only known each other two weeks.'

"'Two weeks or two years,' I cried. 'It is nothing to me. I could not love you more—I shall never love you less.'

"'We are almost strangers,' she answered gently. 'Such sudden love as you profess for me cannot be lasting. It is only a fancy that you will soon forget.'

"'If it should so chance that by giving my life I might save yours, you should know if it were only a fancy, as you call it; or love so deep-rooted in my heart that only death can silence it.'

"'Hush!' she said, giving me her warm, white hand, 'do not speak of dying. Such chances as you speak of do not occur in these commonplace days. Let us talk of it no more. We are friends, are we not?' she added, looking at me with her soft eyes, in which there was a strangely tender expression. 'You shall call upon me in town, and perhaps when you know me better you will be glad that I did not take you at your word.'

"'Yes, let us talk of it no more,' I responded sorrowfully. 'I should have known that there was no hope for me. I am not worthy of such love as yours.'

"I pressed my lips to her hand convulsively, and rushed away.

"The morning of her departure broke dark and stormy. The rain poured down in blinding floods, and the equinoctial gale roared through the great woods and over the roofs of the hotel. I had not the heart to bid her a formal farewell; but after she had entered the carriage to be driven to the station, I took a short cut through the grounds, hoping to catch a last glimpse of her in the train as it passed the bridge.

"Even in this region of tempests such a commotion of the elements had been rarely known before. The valleys were converted into turbid lakes. The great trees groaned and creaked overhead, the air was full of flying branches, and more than once I had to climb over some huge uprooted trunk. When I reached the open space upon the bluff the wind was so violent that I could only keep my feet with a great effort. The river below was now a swollen torrent, choked with fragments of wreck and dashing against the piers of the bridge with a noise like continuous thunder.

"As I crouched behind one of the heavy iron stanchions, I began to be aware of some startling change that was taking place in the great structure before me. I felt a series of shocks vibrating along the trestle, as if a Titan's hammer were beating at its base. As I continued to watch it, the faint tremor grew to a visible rocking motion, and before I could fully comprehend the cause a seam opened between the ironwork and the stone anchorage. Then I understood what was going on. Under the combined power of the wind above and the torrent below, the bridge was giving way. At that moment the bridge tender came leaping along the ties with a face of fear.

"'The bridge, the bridge!' he cried. 'It is going. It will be down in five minutes!'

"Then, with a thrill of horror, I remembered the approaching train, already overdue. Under its weight the bridge would go down like a structure of cards.

"'The train, the train!' I shouted in reply, 'stop the train!'

"He comprehended me, and, seizing his danger signal, ran up the line at the top of his speed. But at the same time I felt the peculiar jar which an advancing train communicates to the rails, followed by the shriek of the escaping steam as the startled engineer reversed his breaks.

"Shall I ever forget the agony of that moment as I saw the engine and its one carriage dash into view round the curve, pouring forth clouds of vapour, like the breath of a labouring giant! On it came, presenting to my terror-stricken eyes the likeness of a living thing struggling against its own destruction. I beheld the driver standing grim and determined, at his throttle valve; I beheld the face of the woman I loved pressed against a window, and the glimmer of her white hand waving an adieu. In a frenzy of despair I endeavoured to spring upon the platform, determined to share her fate, but I missed my grasp, and the huge mass rolled heavily on.

"How the bridge swayed and shook! I saw the top of the carriage sink down— first on one side, and then on the other, recover itself, jolt on a few paces further, and stop directly over the central span, while the engine, which had become detached, shot on and reached the shore in safety as the section it had just left crashed down almost from beneath its tender.

"The carriage remained upon the central span, so close to the verge that one of the wheels hung over the gulf. And now the hinder section, connecting with the bluff upon which I stood, was sinking inch by inch from its anchorage. Bolts, pins, and braces cracked with reports like cannon, until but one twisted and splintered girder supported it. Mad with despair, I sprang down upon it, determined to make my way across it to the carriage, but I was seized by one of the crowd which had quickly gathered upon the scene, and drawn back.

"'What are you doing, sir?' cried a voice. 'You will be dashed to pieces.'

"'What do I care,' I returned, struggling with those who held me. 'In Heaven's name let me go! The woman I love is in that carriage!"

"'Too late, sir. Look!'

"There was a grinding, tearing sound, a roar like near thunder, and a torrent of water upflung even to where we stood. The second section had fallen! The middle span, supported upon the two piers, bearing the carriage, alone remained.

"'That won't stand half an hour,' I heard a voice saying near me. 'Look, there goes a brace. Poor girl—poor girl!"

"I turned upon them fiercely. 'Help me save her, if you are men.'

"'Gladly, sir. But how? Look for yourself. Nothing but a bird could reach that carriage now.'

"I looked and turned pale at the sight. A boiling gulf of water intervened between me and my loved one, and could I have passed it alive, by what means could I have mounted three hundred feet of masonry as smooth as the walls of a house?

"'Oh, Heaven! was she indeed doomed? Must she die so young, by a death so horrible—die under the very eyes of the man who loved her more than his life?

"I believe I was about to end my agony by plunging headlong into the river, when I was restrained by seeing her come out upon the platform and look towards us. For a moment, seemingly resigned to her fate, she made no sign. Then she recognised me, and stretched out her arms appealingly.

"A groan of sympathy went up from the throng of spectators. On my part, I answered her with a wild cry of love and despair.

"Was there no way to save her? Here was the opportunity I had spoken of—of giving up my life for her. Oh, how gladly would I do it, if only there were the ghost of a chance! At that moment my eyes rested upon the three telegraph wires, still suspended between the shore and the piers. A hope and a plan flashed through my mind like an inspiration. If only they would bear my weight! I knelt down, and examined their fastenings; they were looped over stout hooks, buried in the solid woodwork. If the opposite attachment proved equally strong I might cross in safety. But I must risk that.

"I rose and spoke to the crowd, who had been watching me pityingly. They thought from my actions that I had gone mad.

"'Friends,' I said calmly, 'I have found a way to reach her; if you will help me I will save her.'

"I pointed to the telegraph wires and explained my plan. There was a universal protesting cry——

"'Madness! Sheer waste of life! Sure death!'

"But I persisted, argued, threatened. I vowed that if they refused to aid me I would try it unaided. Finally one of the men—a mechanic—who had been examining the wires, joined the group.

"'There is a chance, boys. A mighty slim one, I admit, but who of you wouldn't risk his life to save his wife? And as this here girl is the young man's sweetheart, I reckon there ain't much difference, so I vote we give him a hand.'

"His rough eloquence evoked a cheer of approval, and a dozen men hastened to offer their assistance. First I had a message sent to the telegraph operators to cease using the wires for a time. Then I called for rope, and a hoisting apparatus near by was speedily stripped of its three hundred feet of stout cable. I hurriedly constructed a sling—such as house-painters use—with a loop, which I fastened over the wires, the latter being fortunately placed so near together that my weight would be equally distributed over all three. I got into my sling, fastened the end of the rope about my waist, with directions to secure it firmly to the shore and pay it out as I advanced, and amid a breathless silence began my perilous journey.

"As I swung outward over the gulf, for a moment my head swam and my heart throbbed violently. But the sight of my darling crouched upon the platform of the carriage renewed my courage and I went bravely on.

"If the wires should part with my weight, if the fastenings at the other end were defective, if a knot should slip, I should be plunged to instant destruction. I knew it, but the fear had passed away. If I must die, how could death be met more fitly than in the name of love?

"My progress down the slope of the wires was not difficult, for my own weight assisted me. It was on the upward curve, towards the pier, that my real struggle began. Painfully a few inches at a time, with the heavy ropes bearing upon my loins, I drew myself along hand over hand. In the increasing fury of the gale I was dashed to and fro on my slender support, sometimes so fiercely that I was almost head downward over the roaring water beneath.

"At last, panting and exhausted, I reached the buttress of the pier and drew myself upon it. A faint cheer from the shore hailed the success of the first part of my endeavour, but the more perilous portion still remained to be accomplished. I unbound the rope from my waist, and slipping the loop of my sling over it, knotted it firmly to a projecting beam.

"Picking my way over the violently swaying fabric, I reached the carriage where Octavia sat. With a ghastly face and starting eyes she had watched my slow progress, but she smiled with a sad composure as I mounted the platform.

"'You have risked your life for mine,' she said. 'Why have you done it?'

"'For the sake of the love which you called a fancy,' I replied. 'Did I not speak the truth?'

"'Forgive me,' she answered, 'I did not know my own heart. In the face of death I have learned it! If we escape together I am yours—all yours. If not——'

"'We die together,' I interrupted. 'But come, there is no time to lose. The piers are quaking like reeds.'

"I made her enter the carriage, and remove all of her superfluous clothing; then, wrapping her in her waterproof, I lifted her in my arms and bore her to the starting point of our terrific journey.

"I secured myself in the sling, and holding on with one hand, assisted her down with the other. She clasped her arms about my neck, and burying her face in my bosom, left me free to act.

"Our movement over the wet rope, flung about by the force of the wind, was terribly slow. There were moments when I was compelled to pause and hold on for dear life. But I was labouring for that which was infinitely dearer to me than life, and I seemed to possess the strength and courage of a dozen men.

"Once I looked back. Masses of masonry were falling from the pier, and it shook so violently that the rope was jerked as if by a strong hand. For the moment my courage failed me, and my blistered hands slipped from the rope. But I set my teeth and went on.

"We were within a dozen feet from the shore, and a score of hands were already outstretched to grasp us, when there was a frightful tug at the rope, a general cry of horror, and as the remainder of the bridge fell with a hideous crash into the water, I was dashed violently against the bluff.

"I remembered nothing more until I awoke and found myself lying upon the wet grass, bruised and bleeding, with Octavia bending over me.

"'You are safe,' I whispered; 'thank God for that!'

"'Yes,' she answered softly; 'thank God and the devoted love of a noble heart!'

"She kissed me before all the spectators, and I am bound to say that they appeared to regard it as a very justifiable proceeding.

"But little more remains to be told. My wounds were not serious, but they confined me to bed for several weeks. Not long after my recovery I claimed my reward, which was paid me with a very good grace, with due accompaniments of wedding-bells and bridesmaids. As I perceive Mrs. Acton coming to invite us to dinner, you may have an opportunity of asking her if she has ever found reason to regret her bargain."

Silas Mackay.

THE QUEEN of NIGHT

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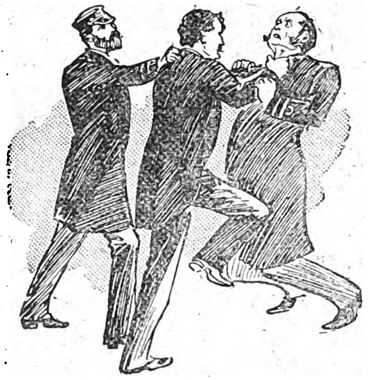
By HEADON HILL,

(*Author of "Guilty Gold," "Zambra the Detective," "The Rajah's Second Wife," etc., etc.*)

CHAPTER XXII.

KENNARD'S COUP.

NOT for long was I to revel in the luxury of feeling that treacherous fiend's life ebbing under the pressure of my thumbs. McIntyre's rough grasp fell upon my shoulder, while the two attendant seamen flung themselves upon me, and dragged me away. As I was hustled to the companion-stairs, Kennard appeared, coming hurriedly from the saloon.



McIntyre's rough grasp fell upon my shoulder.

"For Heaven's sake speak a word to him, General Waldo," appealed McIntyre, "mayhap it will quiet him. The poor young lady has passed away, and it has clean lifted his senses. He has nearly killed the doctor."

But all the "word" I got from Kennard, as he brushed by us towards the state-room, where Zavertal was picking himself up, was the whisper:

"Don't be a fool; you will spoil everything."

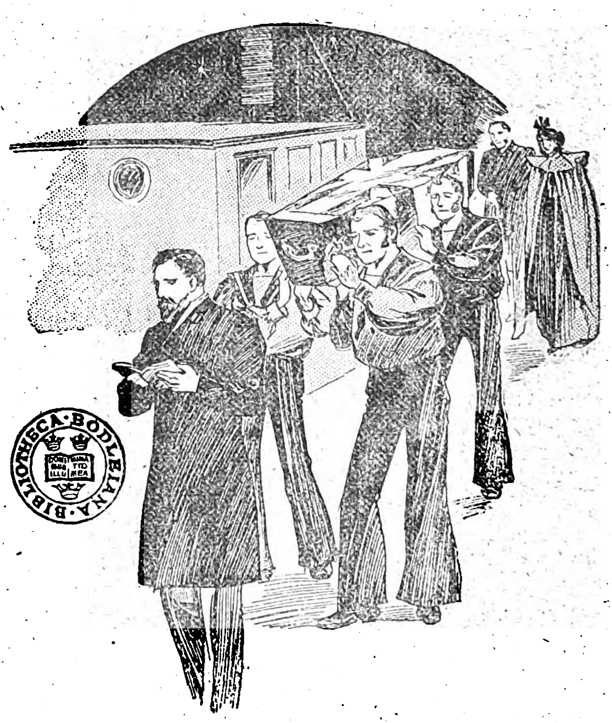
Heaven knows, now that the mad delight of choking Zavertal was denied, there was no need to quiet me. They led me back to the cabin on deck, half dazed with grief, and thrust me in, McIntyre showing by his dejected manner that he sorely repented the rash kindness which had provoked such a scene. He had probably had a taste of his medical officer's quality already, and dreaded the consequences of his having taken me below—too late—for a last word with my dying love.

How long I remained in that stricken state I know not, but as my numbed brain cleared, the brief sentence Kennard had spoken was still ringing in my ears, and to my calmer judgment it began to present vague possibilities of hope. True, I was in the position of one who clutches at straws, but there the straw was, all the same. "Don't be a fool," he had said; "you will spoil everything."

Despite his calling Kennard was a kindly and sympathetic man, and these were hardly the words he would have used to one so bitterly bereaved if he had known that Aline was dead. It would indeed have been the height of selfish egotism to describe his eagerly-desired detection of the criminals as "everything," when their crime had robbed him whom he was addressing of more than all. Again, if he had known that she was dead surely the time would have come for accusation and denouncement, but in place of that he seemed as keen on preserving secrecy as ever.

On the other hand, to discount my vague hope there was the fact that he could not possibly know that she was *not* dead. He was coming from the saloon dinner-table, whence his watchfulness must have prompted him to follow Zavertal on the latter's being summoned to his patient; and he could not therefore be sure that some laxity on Mrs. Brinkworth's part had not yielded an opening to the enemy in the interval since he last held communication with her. Then, too, there was the Doctor's pronouncement that the death was unmistakable, and Mrs. Brinkworth's frantic grief.

So as soon as the clouds had lifted they began to lower again, and I longed eagerly for the coming of Kennard, who alone could solve the mystery. Looking at my watch I found that it was close on eleven o'clock, and I wondered



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Immediately behind McIntyre came four sturdy sailors carrying a coffin.

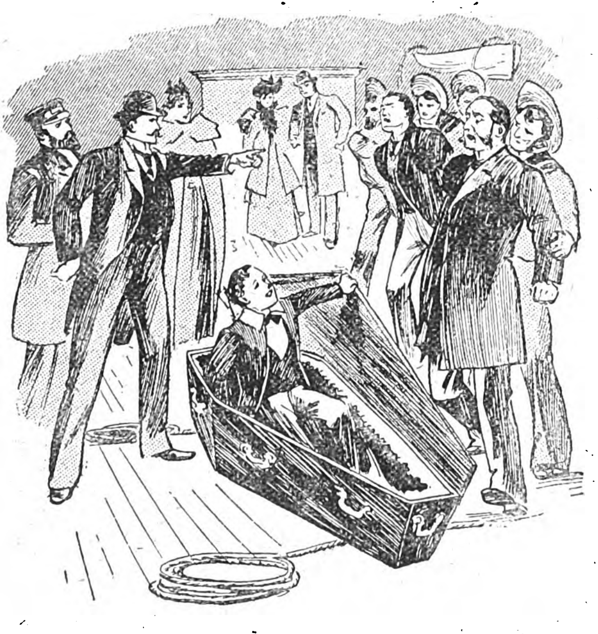
that he had not been before. He must have known my need of him, and yet here was the time when the passengers retired to their berths at hand, and he had given no sign. From the sailors who had me in charge I could gather nothing, for they obstinately refused to speak.

It must have been half an hour after the hush on deck had told that the passengers had retired for the night, that the door was gently opened, and Kennard stole into the cabin. I had not been trusted with a lamp, lest in my supposed madness I should set fire to the ship, but a ray from the electric arc outside, falling on his face, showed that even his stedfast nerves were strung to the highest tension. He came close, and drawing me to the light, read the agony I had been enduring in my sunken cheeks and heavy-lidded eyes.

"Bah! and is it as bad as that?" he murmured. "Why, man, you never give a fellow credit for anything. So you really thought—eh?"

"And it is not so?" I cried, almost beside myself with the reaction that I felt was coming.

"You ought to have known that I could not be more explicit then," he replied. "I should not have spoken roughly to you if you had had real cause for grief. I could not get to you before because for us to be in communication might have given the whole thing away; but if I could have foreseen that good-hearted idiot, McIntyre's, move, I should have found means to warn you somehow. As it was, I had taken careful steps to prevent your being troubled with bad news till I had told you the programme. Zavertal and Vizard are closeted together in the latter's cabin below, but it is well to preserve caution to the end. Listen," and he whispered in my ear half-a-dozen short, crisp sentences, that nearly sent me mad with joy.



"Seize that man!" I cried to the sailors behind him.

"It is to be performed outside here at midnight—an arrangement prompted by gratuitous malice, for the purpose of harrowing you, and snatching a paltry revenge," he concluded. "And now I must be off to see that there is no hitch. Vizard, of course, will have no reason to be present, but he is nearly sure to make an excuse for being on deck at the time, if only for the pleasure of gloating over you. I am ready for him either way."

He left the cabin as quietly as he had entered, and looking at my watch I saw that it wanted ten minutes of midnight. Half the time had elapsed when I heard a whispered conclave outside. Directly it ceased one of my guards put his head in at the door and said:

"Begging your pardon, sir, for the mistake that's been made, and for our part in it, but it is Mr. McIntyre's orders that the door is unlocked and you free to leave when it suits. Meantime me and my mate is to remain—seemingly on guard."

"Right you are, my man," I replied; "least said soonest mended. I'll stay here for the present."

He went out, closing but not locking the door, and I stationed myself so as to command a view of the deck through the window. The night was dead calm, and there was no motion on the ship except the vibration of the engines. At last the silence was broken by the clanging of eight bells for midnight. Hardly had the last stroke died away when the sound of footsteps coming from aft reached me, and peering closer yet I saw McIntyre walking slowly at the head of a little procession, which halted and ranged up at the ship's side opposite my cabin.

There was no doubt about the nature of the ceremony that was to be performed. Immediately behind McIntyre, who led by virtue of his position as acting captain, came four sturdy sailors carrying a coffin that for obvious reasons was evidently heavily weighted. In its rear followed Zavertal and Mrs. Brinkworth, while after a little interval Vizard strolled up, as if attracted to the scene by chance, and took up a position whence he could see my window as well as the business in hand.

At a motion from McIntyre the sailors put the coffin down close to the side, and drawing back a little appeared to wait respectfully for McIntyre to commence reading the service. The two men who had been guarding my door also lounged forward a little, the effect of the grouping, which was carried out in the most natural manner, being that both Zavertal and Vizard, though standing apart, had each three or four seamen in their immediate vicinity.

In the ordinary course everything would have been ready for commencement, but McIntyre hesitated, turning over the leaves of his prayer-book as though he had a difficulty in finding his place. This is not at all an unusual occurrence with a captain called on to read the burial service, but McIntyre was shooting glances in the direction of the companion-stairs. They escaped the notice of the mourners, whose heads were decorously bent; but I, watching every move, saw them quite plainly, and burned with feverish anticipation.

At last a quick flash passed over the Scotsman's face, and he dropped his book with a bang on the coffin-lid. Knowing what was to happen at that signal, I gazed from Vizard to Zavertal and back again, not to lose a fraction of the vengeance which they had thought to wreak on me, but which, after all these tortuous windings, was now to be turned against themselves. The coffin lid was raised with a jerk, and out sprang young Lord Darranmore, his face aglow with excitement and boyish impudence.

"You've got the wrong one, Doctor, and not dead either," he piped in his shrill boyish treble, pointing at Zavertal, while the sailors edged up closer. "So nice of you to change the turns, and give a poor boy a chance. You had better have stuck to the programme, and *settled Darranmore on the run from Italy to Alexandria*, eh?" And he kept on vociferating till I stepped quietly out of the cabin, when even his exuberance yielded to the coming climax.

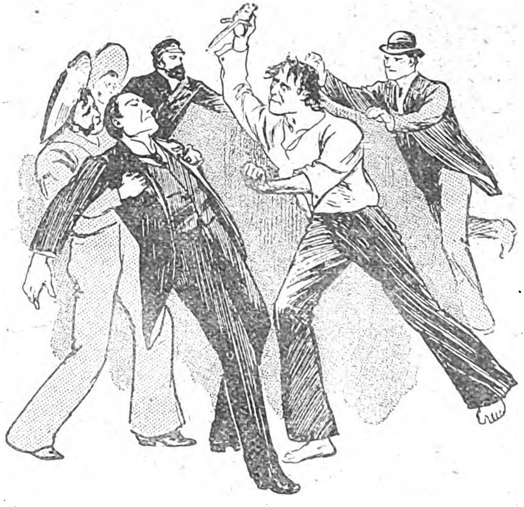
At the first sight of the little Earl, Zavertal's broad face had broken out into beads of perspiration; and Vizard, scowling defiance at me, now muttered a startled oath heard by all. The suddenness of the grim jest sprung upon them had, as was intended, caused them to "give themselves away" in the presence of witnesses, but their cup was not yet full. As I advanced to join the group on one side, from the other came the sound of Kennard's natural voice, and all eyes turned that way to see the American detective, stripped of all disguise, coming from the companion-house with Aline on his arm. At the sight Zavertal folded his arms and groaned as one who admits that hope is gone.

At the same moment McIntyre touched his cap to me and said: "You are in charge again, sir. Thank God my part is done."

I merely nodded, for I was watching Vizard narrowly, guessing that he was made of sterner stuff than his fellow-criminal, and now a furtive motion of his hands caused me to act promptly.

"Seize that man," I cried to the sailors behind him, and so well drilled had they been by Kennard and McIntyre in the part they had to play, that six brawny arms were round the villain before he could get to his pistol. Simultaneously the other sailors took possession of Zavertal's portly form, and the capture was complete.

At a gesture from Kennard Mrs. Brinkworth joined Aline, and together the two ladies left the deck—glad enough, as they told me afterwards, to be released from the glare of Vizard's burning eye. He made no attempt to struggle with his captors or to utter speech, but his silence, aided by that snake-like glitter, was more terrible than words.



Stabbed Vizard again and again.

"So," said Kennard, coming in front of him, "my European trip has led to business. I had heard of the Red Heart and Black Arrow—as who of the inner circle of my trade has not?—but I never thought that a six months' holiday was to lead to the breaking of the gang and the arrest of its chief. I have to thank the taint of an old scent left by your friend Zavertal there for the lucky chance. You made a false step, Mr. Vizard—to call you by your last known name—when you allied yourself with a gentleman of such notorious record."

It will be remembered that Vizard had never seen Kennard in his own character, and he had excellent reasons for not suspecting his identity. The stranger's taunt stung him into curiosity. "Who is this fellow?" he ground out between his clenched teeth, shooting a furious glance at his trembling colleague.

"It is Kennard; you must have made a mistake," the wretch replied.

"Then I have met my match; we are fairly beaten," was Vizard's comment, murmured in tones that had changed to the quiet chagrin of a beaten man; and when at the same moment I signed to the seamen to take the prisoners to the place that had been prepared for them, he gave no trouble.

I shall always believe that this sudden submission was only a ruse of his subtle brain working towards some fresh scheme for revenge, liberty, or both; but if so he was moved by a short-lived hope. The procession had taken only about half-a-dozen steps when the wild figure of a man, barefoot, and with nothing on but trousers and shirt, rushed from some lair where he had lain concealed, and stabbed Vizard again and again, all helpless as he was in the grasp of his guards. Kennard, McIntyre, and I sprang forward and seized the assailant, to find that he was Dicey—the skipper of the *Miranda*—relapsed into raving delirium.

We handed him over to the men of the watch who crowded round, as quiet as a lamb now that his purpose was gained, and exulting that he had "got square" on the man who had tempted him with fair promises, then shot him, and afterwards abandoned him in the doomed vessel.

"Any one of the wounds would have been fatal," pronounced Kennard, rising from an examination of the great criminal's dead body. "Believe me, I am not spiteful when I express the wish that that miserable tool of his could have permitted me the luxury of seeing him hanged."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ANCHOR DOWN.

After Zavertal had been safely stowed under lock and key, a council of war was held between Kennard, McIntyre, and myself, and resulted in a decision to run for Naples and report all the circumstances at the Consulate.

It was necessary that the authorities at home should be apprised of what had happened, so that they might be beforehand with any rumours that might enable Nathan to escape; while it was also imperative that the position of Sir Simon Crawshay and others, as clients of the Murder Syndicate, should receive the early attention of Scotland Yard. We were also moved by the consideration that Vizard must have had accomplices of greater or lesser degree at Naples—Mr. Matthew Mayfield, for instance—whom it would be highly desirable to secure.

The conference lasted far into the night; but late, or rather early in the morning, as it was when it ended, I found Aline up and waiting for me in the saloon, whither Mrs. Brinkworth had taken her. I must ask permission to draw a veil over our meeting. We had been parted a few days only, but into them had been crowded the events of a lifetime, and both of us had stood, during that brief separation, on the threshold of the Great Beyond. What people have to say to each other, under these conditions, concerns themselves alone.

The explanation of my dear girl's apparent death had already been furnished to me by Kennard. Having found unmistakable traces of poison in the medicine supplied to her by Zavertal, he was struck with the idea of springing such a surprise on them that they would be bound to incriminate themselves. In selecting his rather gruesome method he was moved by the fact that he was dealing with gruesome men, and that nothing short of the resuscitation of their supposed victim would attain that end. As an afterthought, however, he modified the plan by substituting Darranmore for Aline as the occupant of the coffin, and the boy, needless to say, entered into it heart and soul.

The great difficulty in his way was to manage so that Aline should simulate death without being detected by Zavertal, and here my dear girl herself came to his aid by proposing to take an anæsthetic drug which he had with him. All that remained was to prevent Zavertal from closely examining the "body," and to bestow her, unseen, in a place of safety during the interval between her "death" and "funeral."

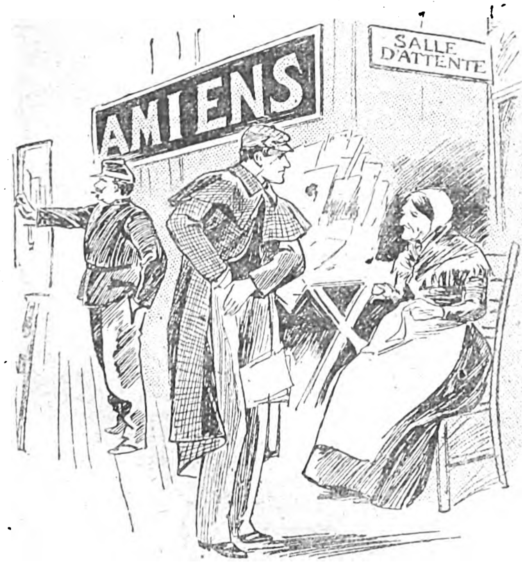
This was cleverly contrived, first by Mrs. Brinkworth's skilful acting at which I happened to be present, and secondly by McIntyre, who was taken into confidence after my return to confinement, giving facilities for smuggling Aline into another cabin. There she remained till it was time for her to appear at her own burial and complete the climax. Darranmore was introduced into Aline's cabin, half-a-dozen trustworthy sailors were told off as bearers, with instructions how to act, and the mine was laid which ended in the breaking of the gang.

In the morning there was no keeping the tragedy of the night from being known throughout the ship. To prevent false reports getting about I assembled the passengers in the saloon, and at my request Kennard briefly explained what had occurred. The announcement caused a widespread horror, which quickly developed into a general determination to leave the *Queen of Night* at Naples and return home overland rather than continue the voyage on a vessel with such terrible associations. As usual, the panic was strongest among those who never could have had any cause for alarm, and indeed it was afterward proved by documentary evidence found at Nathan's office that Orlebar, Lord Darranmore, and Aline were the only passengers on this trip who had sailed under the "special" arrangement which was the mainstay of this lucrative but fiendish enterprise.

When it was decided to turn the ship's head for Naples we were about fifteen hours' steam from that port, and it was therefore far advanced in the afternoon when we reached the bay. Kennard was very anxious that there should be no communication with the shore till he had laid the case before the Consul and enabled the latter to cable to the home authorities, and accordingly at the detective's request I signalled an urgent request for the British representative to come aboard. On his arrival it was arranged that the steamer should be taken home by McIntyre, and that Zavertal should go in her in close custody. Kennard and I were to escort Mrs. Brinkworth and Aline home overland.

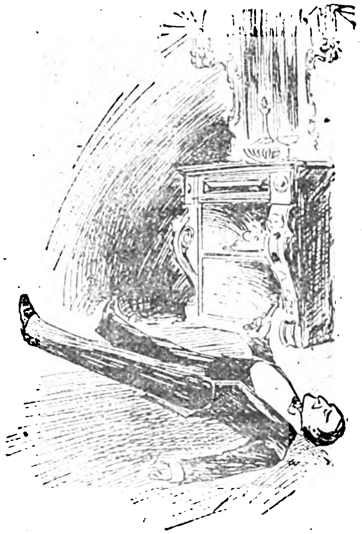
After noting all particulars, the Consul left to cable to Scotland Yard, and to see to the arrest of Signor Volpe—a proceeding in which I was especially interested, as it was surmised that if the Italian police were smart enough the haul would include Mr. "Matthew Mayfield." I may say here that the hope that that mealy-mouthed scoundrel would be captured was doomed to disappointment, for the office was found empty and the bird flown.

It was conjectured that he had scented danger on seeing the unexpected arrival of the *Queen of Night* and the signal for the Consul. It transpired that with the exception of the Italian clerk, this person formed the whole establishment of a mythical Volpe, posing as a manager under the name of Tucker, Mayfield being a pseudonym put on for his dealings with me. How far he was acquainted with the methods of his principals was never known, but it is beyond doubt that he aided Vizard willingly, and with his eyes open, to entrap me on to the *Miranda*, for an object that he must have known was a nefarious one.



The detective had been eagerly purchasing papers at the bookstall.

The antecedents of the man Dicey were found to be pretty much what might have been expected. He had been discharged for misconduct from an English yacht, and was loafing about the quays of Naples, ripe for any villainy, when Vizard found in him a ready tool to navigate the rattle-trap old steamer which he purchased, first to be the scene of my murder and then as a means of rejoining the *Queen of Night*. We can dismiss him from these pages once for all. He was landed from the ship, and taken to the International hospital, where he died a week later from the effect of the wound received in the cabin of the *Miranda*.



Sir Simon shot himself.

It was at Amiens, as we were speeding northwards across France, that the first news reached us through the English papers, of the effect of the Consul's cabled information to Scotland Yard. The train was full of the *Queen of Night's* late passengers, but we four—Aline and Mrs. Brinkworth, Kennard and I—had secured a *coupé* to ourselves. The detective had been eagerly purchasing papers at the bookstall, and when he returned to his seat, deep in the perusal of a heavily-leaded paragraph, it was plain that he had found what he wanted. He read quietly to the end, and then said:

"That man Mayfield has euchred the Consul and got his own cable in first. At any rate, Nathan got wind of the exposure and bolted. He is safe in custody, though—by means of a smartish capture as he was leaving for Holland."

He hesitated a little, then looked across at Aline and added: "I suppose you have no lingering feeling for your guardian, Miss Challenor?"

"I never had any to linger," said Aline simply. "There could not be any pretence of affection between us, for he always treated me as if I was an encumbrance. My father had no near relatives, and but few friends, and only appointed him because he had the next place to ours in the country and had a knowledge of our estates."

"Well, then, there will be no harm in telling you the news," said Kennard. "Sir Simon shot himself yesterday morning on learning through the papers of Nathan's arrest. It is rumoured also that the Honourable Ralph Darran, the next heir to the Darranmore title, who sent our lively young Earl on this trip, is missing. I should not be surprised to hear that there are other gaps in English society later—due to Zavertal's operations on previous voyages. There have been three such, I understand, this year since the ship has been under its recent owners."

His words were prophetic, for in several families of more or less note there were mysterious disappearances during the next few days, and it did not fail to be remarked that most, if not all, of the withdrawals were of recently enriched inheritors who had lost relatives on the *Queen of Night*.

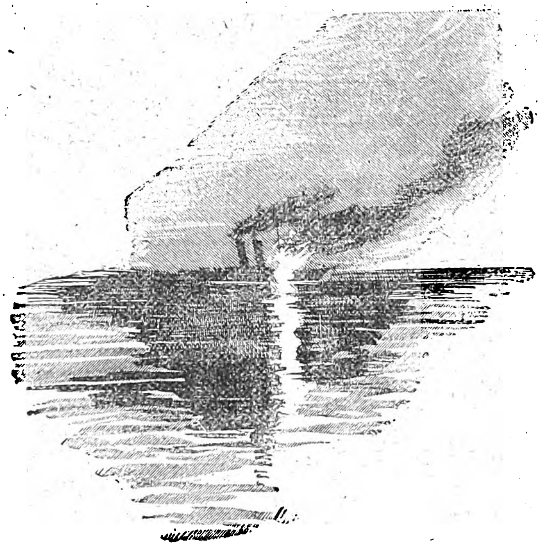
So secretly had the system been worked that there was no proof which would have justified pursuit and arrest, the documents found at Vizard's palatial mansion in Park Lane being written in a cypher which defied discovery. Enormous sums were found entered in a private ledger in a safe hidden in the wall of an octagon room where he transacted business, but there was no vestige of readable matter showing on what account they had been received. They, however, tallied with sums appearing in the banking account of Nathan and Co., and were undoubtedly the various amounts of blood-money received by the "firm."

On reaching London we took Aline to the firm of solicitors who had acted for her late father, and they at once made arrangements that she should remain with Mrs. Brinkworth till she should attain her majority, and thus avoid the necessity of having to return to Sir Simon's house, where his sister was now in possession. Orlebar's ill-used wife forgot her troubles in serving us, and is to this day our devoted and faithful friend. She was doubly avenged, inasmuch as the wicked woman who had supplanted her in her wretched husband's affections, and had then sent him to his doom, herself met with a terrible end a year later in a revolution in the Argentine, whither her fears of discovery had taken her.

With the exception of the conviction and hanging of Nathan, which followed in due course, the last act in this eventful drama occurred a week after our return. We were sitting—Kennard and I—late one evening in the hotel where we had taken up our abode, and the detective was telling me a few facts about the gang whose symbol was the "Red Heart and Black Arrow."

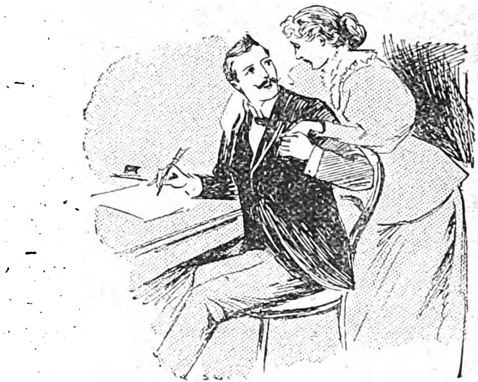
"Vizard was the sole irresponsible chief," he said, "but Nathan, and, of late, Zavertal, were partners on an equal footing so far as knowledge was concerned. The subordinate helpers in all parts of the world, while thoroughly unscrupulous, probably had no guilty knowledge beyond their own humble parts. I heard of the organisation years ago, when they confined their talents to big bond-forgeries and gigantic long-firm frauds. I imagine it was Zavertal's reputation as a successful poisoner that inspired Vizard with the idea of enlisting him and starting a yacht-owning murder syndicate."

"If you had not chanced to sail with us, the thing might have gone on indefinitely," I replied. "An unscrupulous ship's doctor has wholesale facilities for murder, without fear of inquiry. It was a tremendous scheme, but the basis of it was really very simple and easy."


The "Queen of Night" had been burned at sea.

"The schemes of great criminals are generally like that," said Kennard, and—"Come in," he added, as someone knocked at our door.

It was McIntyre who entered, looking so haggard and dishevelled that we were not surprised at the news he brought. The *Queen of Night* had been burned at sea, off Ushant, and Zavertal with her.


"The lass that loved a sailor."

"His was the only life lost," proceeded McIntyre, when we had made him comfortable. "We kept him for safety in one of the steward's pantries, on the lower deck, and when the fire broke out and it became necessary to quit the ship, I went below with a man to fetch him. On unlocking the door from the outside it refused to open, and I then remembered that there was a bolt on the inside as well. This he had shot, and nothing I could shout through the door would induce him to draw it. The fire had gained such ground that we should have lost our lives if we had stayed to break down the door. It was practically a case of suicide."

"A fitting end for the ship and the man," was Kennard's only comment.

* * * * * *

And now as this has been a story of incident, I must not "lag superfluous" before my readers, with no more incidents to offer them. My wife's arguments prevailed, and I have abandoned the sea. But though I have become a landsman, I am not wholly an idler—with the care of her vast estates to employ me. It is two years since that stormy cruise ushered in for Aline and me a time of peaceful calm that knows no cloud, and shows no sign of breaking; and writing here in our quiet Herefordshire home, with miles and miles of apple-blossom outside my window, the cell in the Convent of Santa Lucia, the cuddy of the *Miranda*, and the deck-cabin next the surgery on the *Queen of Night*, seem far away indeed. Yet that they were once very present realities two things remain always to remind me—the letters of my friend Kennard, well and prosperous in the States, and the sweet voice that is even now bidding me lay down my pen—the voice of "the lass that loved a sailor."

The End.

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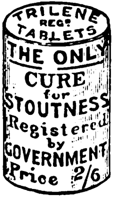

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10½ft. by 12ft.	**13/6**
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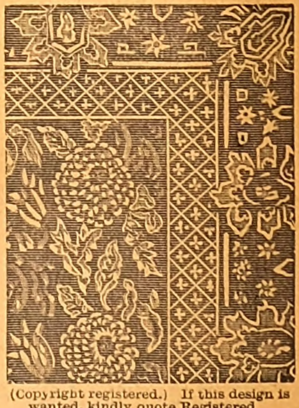

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EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 362. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 7TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

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		Each.			Each.
6ft. by 9ft.,	Reduced Sale Price	5/6	10½ft. by 12ft.	Reduced Sale Price	13/6
7½ft. by 9ft.	" " "	7/6	12ft. by 12ft.,	" " "	15/6
9ft. by 9ft.	" " "	8/6	12ft. by 13½ft.,	" " "	17/6
9ft. by 10½ft.,	" " "	9/6	12ft. by 15ft.,	" " "	19/6
9ft. by 12ft.,	" " "	11/6	12ft. by 18ft.,	" " "	24/0

When ordering please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

Blairquhan, Maybole. N.B., August 3rd, 1894.

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A Reversible "Prudential" Hearthrug (Reg)., to match above Carpets, sent for 1s. 6d. extra, size 2 yards long, and 1 yard wide.

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON

No. 362.] For the Week ending December 7th, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

ADVENTURE
LOVE
WAR
HUMOUR
PATHOS

A PIECE OF GOLD.

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THERE are times in all circles of story-tellers when a spirit of reverie seems to come upon everyone. Thus it was when the learned judge of the court, sitting with his friends, had related an instance of one who, through trying to defraud a sister of a share in the father's property, outwitted himself and came to a miserable end.

For several moments no one spoke:

At last the lawyer.

"Gold is worse than an enchanter; it is a demon. As you said, judge, men will sell their very souls for its possession. If any one of us could be given the power of seeing all the passions and motives of men laid bare, it would drive him crazy in a day. If what men conceal could be opened to the light, how men would recoil from their own doings! It is only by concealment that the petty, the mean, the dishonest can be satisfied with themselves."

"Very true," said the judge, still inclined to be silent.

Another spell of musing was broken by the lawyer.

"I once had a queer experience in my own practice; in fact, as odd a case as I ever knew."

"You've had a busy life, Tom, in New York, and you know that is called the devil's headquarters," said the judge. "If you know the worst that ever happened there it will be something pretty bad."

"True," said the other, "it would be bad enough. But what this is you must judge for yourselves after I have told it. It serves to show what an all-absorbing passion the desire for wealth is. When we speak of gold usually in this connection, we use the term figuratively, meaning anything which may be the object of greed. In my story there was literal gold that had to do with it, and was, in fact, the most curious part of it.

"One of my first clients in New York was a wealthy, retired merchant, named Bertrand. He lived very simply, alone except for his housekeeper, in a retired, but very respectable, part of the city. He had a nephew, Frank Bertrand, a brother's son, whom he regarded as a scapegrace, and with whom he was not at all on good terms.

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"Frank seemed to me to be a modest, sensible sort of a fellow, and I wondered at the old man's feeling towards him, when he was the only relative he had in the world. My curiosity aroused, I pondered the matter somewhat, and came to the conclusion that the fault was the old man's, not Frank's. He was rather high-spirited and wilful about making his own way in the world and doing as he pleased with himself, instead of allowing his rich uncle to dictate what he should do. This seemed to be the extent of his offence, so far as I could learn.

"The old man was testy and choleric, and childish about having his own way—a family trait, I guess—and not only forbade the nephew the house, but required me to make his will, cutting Frank off with only a very insignificant sum. All the rest of his large property he gave to his housekeeper, because, as he said, she had been kind to him, and would care for him as long as he lived.

"I talked with Frank about this disposition of the property and advised him not to throw away such a chance, but to attempt a reconciliation with his uncle, so he might change his will. The young fellow was obdurate and would promise nothing. He was an artist, and his whole soul was in his work. This his uncle detested more than all else as a species of vagabondism he could never tolerate. No reconciliation was possible while this remained, and I could not help admiring the boy's energy and spirit when he declared he would not give up his profession for all the fortunes in New York.

"He said he bore no ill will against his uncle, his property was his own to do with as he pleased; he spoke pleasantly of his uncle's peculiar notions, his temper and his weaknesses, and mentioned the housekeeper kindly, as one who had treated him well. As he left my office I said to myself: 'Well, Frank Bertrand, you deserve a fortune if you don't get one. A man has reason to be proud of such a nephew as you.'

"Not a month after that interview word was brought me that Mr. Bertrand had been found murdered in his library. I summoned the best detective I knew of, and hastened to the spot. An entrance had been made through the ordinary passages of the house, as there was no breakage. The victim had been struck from behind as he sat in his chair. The instrument used was a heavy one; the skull had been crushed, and death was instantaneous. At first we thought not a thing in the room had been touched, but the housekeeper called my attention to the fact that a nugget of gold which remained attached to a piece of its quartz matrix, the single geological specimen and curio which adorned the library, was missing, as well as the little velvet-lined box in which it had rested. Everything else was in its usual place as if nothing had happened there. This was our only clue, and to my astonishment and dismay it speedily led to the arrest of Frank Bertrand as the murderer.

"I had formed so good an opinion of the boy, and his manliness seemed so certain, that I found it hard to believe that he was even accused of murdering his uncle. That he was guilty was to my mind beyond the bounds of probability. I resolutely put that down for a fact. It being learned that he was seen in the vicinity of the house at the time of the murder, the detective went to his room to interview him as to his knowledge of the affair, and found him standing in the middle of the apartment in a state of excitement, and holding in his hand that same tell-tale nugget of gold.

So absorbed was he in it that he did not notice the quiet approach of the officer until he was close upon him. Then he made a movement as if to hide the secret. It was a perfect case of circumstantial evidence against him. Being arrested he impetuously defied his accusers, and would have resorted to violence against them had I not appeared on the scene and bade him desist. Seeing me he burst into a flood of tears.

"I demanded a further investigation of the case, but the detective informed me that it would be useless to look further for the murderer, and evidently looked upon me as somewhat out of my head for asking such a thing. From that moment I became my own detective.

"Of course my first move was to secure a calm, rational interview with Frank. This was in his cell. I will not repeat his indignant declarations of innocence, nor his pitiful appeal to me not to believe it of him. How came he by that piece of gold, and why was he at his uncle's house? Those were the questions to be answered.

"'I can answer the last easy enough,' he replied, 'but about the nugget I know no more than you.'

"'You were taken with it in your hands,' I said.

"'I know it; I had just taken it from my pocket.'

"'How came it in your pocket?'

"'I don't know.'

"'Well, that's singular, to say the least,' said I. 'Now, how came you there?'

"'Mrs. Bland called and said my uncle wanted to see me. I went, of course.'

"Mrs. Bland was the housekeeper. I thought I had struck a fact that would help us, and whistled softly. 'Did you see her when you got there?' I asked.

"'I saw no one there,' Frank replied. 'My ring was not answered. I tried the door and it was fast. I did not want to disappoint him after he had kindly sent for me, so I attempted to go in the back way as I had done before, but I found that fast also. Then, as I could arouse no one, I turned and came away. When I got back in my room somewhat nonplussed at not being admitted after my uncle had sent for me, I happened to put my hand in my pocket, and found there the nugget. I knew it was my uncle's for I had often seen it there, and how it came to be in my pocket was a mystery that excited me somewhat. It seemed like witchcraft.'

"I did not doubt the truth of Frank's story in the least. 'Someone put it in your pocket to throw suspicion on you; but how, and when, and where? Did Mrs. Bland come close to you when she came to say your uncle wished to see you?'

"'No, she did not come in. She left word at the door. But from my window I saw her go by. I'm sure it was her, but she could not have put the nugget in my pocket.'

"I may as well say here that the housekeeper had been cross-examined, and was conclusively proved to be elsewhere when the murder occurred. 'Was she an accomplice?' was the question I was pondering. A thought occurred to me. 'Did you find in your pocket the little velvet-lined box that held the nugget?' I asked.

"'No, there was nothing but the piece of gold, that I saw,' Frank replied.

"I went straight to Frank's lodgings and made a careful search. I searched the Bertrand mansion for the missing box, but found nothing.

"Mrs. Bland seemed very much distressed over what had happened, and was much concerned for Frank. She declared she didn't believe a word of the story that he was guilty. She said his uncle called to her from his room, as he often did, and directed her to call Frank. As she was going to a neighbour's she stopped on the way for the errand. She locked the house behind her on leaving, as was her custom, and found it locked on her return. She did not see Mr. Bertrand when he spoke to her; only heard his voice.

"I then went to my office and shut myself into my private room to quietly analyse the situation. Who, besides his housekeeper, had a motive for murdering Mr. Bertrand? I pondered the question over and over again. That there was an answer to it I was sure. But who had that motive? That once settled in my own mind, I would look further for the little box. I could easily see how Frank Bertrand had a strong existing motive to keep his uncle alive until he should make a different will. In his death he lost all hope. Only sudden anger under strong provocation could have moved him to the deed. But he was already out of my suspicion.

"I am a great believer in *motive* as the lever that moves human beings in the commission of all deliberate crimes. That it was not mere robbery in this case was evident, since only the nugget of gold was taken, and that I attributed to a momentary fancy rather than to any previous intention. It could not be hatred, for the old man had not an enemy in the world that we could discover. It must, then, be greed of some sort, some advantage to be gained through Mr. Bertrand's death.

"Here was another dilemma. His housekeeper was to have all the property, and she could not have committed the murder. It must then be somebody reaching further, somebody hoping for gain through her. But the old woman had not a relative in the world that I had ever heard of. She had lived very many years in the family, and I thought her relatives would have been heard from, if there were any greedy enough to commit murder in order to give her property which they might not get after all. Had she a lover?

"The thought struck me with such a sense of its affording a solution of the mystery, that it was like an electric shock. She would not marry while Mr. Bertrand lived; his death would make her free, and besides would make her wealthy, two great points to be gained, which might have a strong influence on a weak-minded man. I was sure also from the taking of the nugget, that whoever he was he would be found to have been a miner or a collector of ores or minerals. Full of my new idea, I started out to investigate.

"I had great faith in Mrs. Bland's honesty in the matter, but I did not think it prudent to go to her now for information, for I had not proved her integrity as I had Frank's, and she might, if an accomplice, give a warning that would defeat my purpose. I went to the few persons she was intimate with, and made cautious inquiries about her gentleman friends. It is almost needless to say I found one.

"He was a tall, gaunt fellow, and swarthy, like those who have been exposed to the sunlight. He had been a miner in Australia. Mrs. Bland had confided to a female friend that the man proposed but she refused him 'because she could not leave Mr. Bertrand.' I now decided to go straight to Mrs. Bland and ask if this man knew of the contents of the will. Tears came into her eyes as she admitted that he did. She had inclined to favour his proposal, and had agreed to marry him after Mr. Bertrand's death.

"I found where the man had his lodging, and taking an officer, made all haste there. His room was shabby enough, but, ah! there were the minerals, as I had surmised. We arrested him as the murderer of Henry Bertrand, and, after some search among his rather mixed belongings, found there the box with the velvet lining.

"When that was brought forth, his defiant manner fell away from him, and he begged for mercy like a child. He confessed all, even to brushing against Frank Bertrand on his way home to slip the nugget into his pocket. At the time of the murder he caught sight of the gold lump, and was suddenly possessed of a singular fancy for it, as it was such as he had long searched for in the mines. Realising later how dangerous was its possession, he disposed of it to throw suspicion upon Frank. All my theories were thus curiously verified."

The lawyer paused, apparently at the end of his story. There was one present who had the general appearance of a detective, who had been carefully following his narrative. He asked:

"Pardon two questions, sir. How came the murderer in the house without the housekeeper's knowledge, and who was it sent for the nephew?"

"I was going to tell you that presently," said the narrator. "The fellow explained that he had been determined for some time to get Mr. Bertrand out of the way, as that meant for him both a wife and a fortune. He had been waiting for an opportunity. Going to the house that day, he found the door unfastened and slipped in and concealed himself. He heard the old man give directions to have Frank called, and heard Mrs. Bland say she was going to stop awhile with a friend. Fortune was favouring his plans. Not only that but the fear came that Bertrand was relenting towards his nephew and might spoil all his hopes unless speedily dispatched. Frank Bertrand would be brought to the house just in time to be accused of the deed. It was the propitious time.

"The blow fell, the old man passed to his reward, and he fled. To his annoyance, the door locked with a spring behind him, and Frank, whom he was watching as he came, could not get in. Then came the thought to fasten the crime on him more securely by putting the nugget in his pocket

"It has been truly said that men committing great crimes always do some act or leave some act undone, despite all their precautions, that tells the tale of their wrong doing. So this man, who seemingly had all his plans perfect, in his eagerness and excitement, forgot to put on Frank's person the box as well as its contents, and now it rose up a conclusive witness against him."

"Now I've got a question," ventured another listener. "What did the old lady do with the property? Did she hunt up another husband, or, give it to an asylum?"

"Neither. She was really a good woman, and was struck with horror at the villainy of the man who wanted to marry her for her prospective money. I think that every day, for she is still living, she feels thankful that she escaped the fate of marrying him. She turned the whole property over to Frank, saying she had no doubt his uncle would have relented towards him if he had lived. She lives with him, making a home for him like a mother, and they think a great deal of each other. The piece of gold and the velvet box which played so important a part in the tragedy of their lives, still rest in their old place in the library."

James Vaughn.

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GOLDEN STAR

A ROMANCE

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

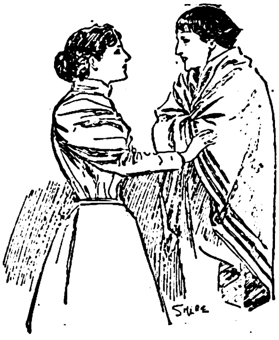
CHAPTER XXV.

In the House of the Incas.

Francis Hartness and I came last out of the passage, and I asked him to lead the soldiers out of the hollow and across the plain to the wall of Sascahuaman, where I would join them, and as soon as they had gone out of the hollow and were lost to sight, I went to the hole among the bushes where the hidden stone was and released the chain and let the water flow back into its old place till the entrance to the Hall of Gold was only the same dark stagnant pool that any wanderer might find at the bottom of the cloven stairway.

Then the earth was strewn over the hole, and the stones and brushwood were piled round and over it as before, and we went away to join the others. We found them standing in a group in one of the angles of the great fortress, and there I spoke to the soldiers again, and told them how much depended both for themselves and for the country on their fidelity, promising them peace and prosperity and freedom if they were faithful, and a speedy death if they betrayed me.

After this I told them what story they should tell when they went back to the city: How their Indian guide had led them into the entrance to a cavern in the mountain, their officer going first, and he following, and how, when these two were going on with a single light, some two or three yards ahead of them a great slab of stone had suddenly fallen down between them, closing the passage, and how water had risen up and filled the passage at its lower end, so forcing them to run back out of it for fear of being drowned, and I further gave them permission to bring any who disbelieved them to the mouth of the cleft under the Sayacusca and show them the water that they would find there, but to take good care to send me warning of anyone going there.



She came to me and laid her hand on my arm.

This they promised to do, and still full of wonder and yet pleased with the gold they had got, and the promises I had made to them, they made a loyal farewell, and marched down through the Gate of Sand, and went back to the city to tell their story, and do the work that I had bidden them do.

When they had gone I sent some of my men to see that none of them turned back, and dismissed the rest to their homes, saving only Tupac, Anahuac, and Ainu, and three others who could be trusted with all things; and with these we went back into the underground chambers of the fortress by the way that we had left them.

When we got back to the throne-room I sent all but Tupac away to remove the beasts from the stables and take them to the hacienda so that the next night under cover of the darkness they could return and bring us food and drink and clothing and other things that we needed, for now that matters had gone so far it would not be safe for us to live at the hacienda or be seen in any place known to the Spaniards until the time was ripe for the striking of the first blow.

When they were gone we ate and drank a little of what we had brought with us in the morning, and then lay down, either to sleep or to think of the strange things that had happened and of what was now quickly coming to pass.

As for me, no sleep came to my eyes, for I knew that when Joyful Star awoke I should have to tell her at least something of what her brother had done and of what had happened to him, and a grievous task it was, you may be sure when I came to the doing of it, as I did not many hours afterwards.

The first thing she asked me when she found that Djama was not with us was what had become of him, and then, knowing that sooner or later the bitter truth had to be told, I told her as gently as I was able, and hiding from her all that I could without lying to her. My words struck her dumb with horror and amazement, and if it had not been that Francis Hartness and the Professor were there, and told her that they had seen and heard with their own eyes and ears the truth of all that I said, I do not think she would have believed me. But when at last she could no longer doubt the story of her brother's crime and treachery, she came to me and laid her hand upon my arm, and looked up at me with tearful eyes and said:

"But you will not kill him, Vilcaroya, for my sake, will you? He is my brother, you know, after all, though he has made me almost ashamed to say so. You must protect yourself, of course, and your people from treachery, but you will not kill him, will you?"

"He is alive now," I said, "because he is Joyful Star's brother, not because I think he is worthy to live, for he would have betrayed one life that he gave back, and stained the other with infamy. But I have given my word, and he shall live, and when he can do no more harm I will pardon him, and he shall go back to his own country in safety. More than that I cannot promise even to you."

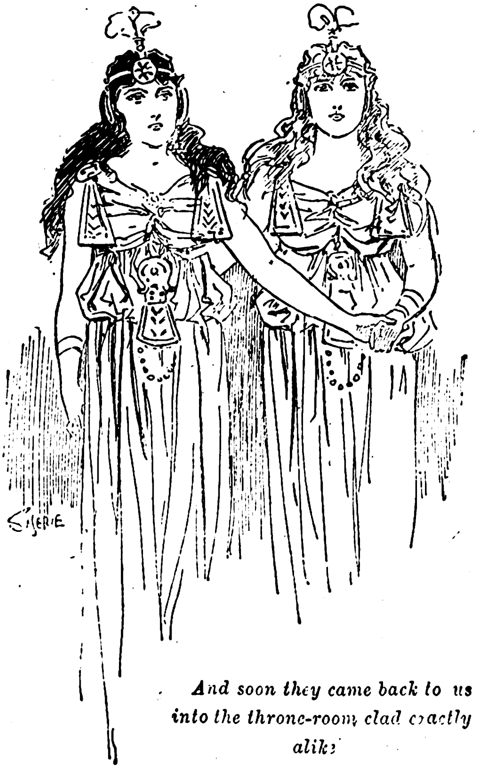
"It is all that I can expect," she said, "and more than he could expect after what he has done. But, oh! why should he have brought such a shame as this upon us?"

"Upon himself only," I said. "It would not be possible for such a thing as shame to touch you."

She looked up at me again and smiled through her tears as if my words had pleased her well, and that smile of hers was more to me than even her tears. Then she went back to the little chamber where she had slept, and presently returned leading Golden Star by the hand, and then we all sat down in the silver seats and talked of the wonderful things that had happened, and I told Golden Star all the story of my own return to life and hers, and what I knew of the changes that had happened in the world since she and I had said our last words to each other in the Sanctuary of the Sun; and then I set her talking with the others, translating for her and for them as well as I could, and she, knowing nothing of what had happened in the night and being glad that Evil Eyes, as she called Djama in our own speech, had gone away for a long time, was as happy as a child amongst us, and soon even Ruth became more cheerful and began to try and make her say words of English and repeat her name and the Professor's and Francis Hartness' after her, for she already loved her dearly, and, even in the midst of her own sorrow, she was rejoiced that the soul which had slept had been so happily reawakened in her.

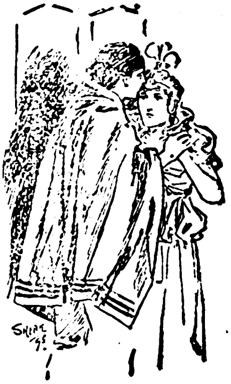
After this Francis Hartness and I began to talk our plans over again and to discuss the chances of the revolt in Cuzco, and I showed him how, with the help of my people, I would the next day cut off all communication between the valley and the rest of the country until our work was finished there, for I was determined that the first part of the empire of my father's that I would re-take should be the City of the Sun itself and the region that it commanded, since I knew that my people still looked upon it as the most sacred spot on earth and would fight better to take it than any other place. And in this plan Francis Hartness, looking at the matter as a soldier, also agreed with me.

We thought it best that none of us should show ourselves in the open that day, for we knew not what the effect of the soldiers' story and their return without their officer might be in Cuzco, for if it had become widely known it would certainly bring many people up to the Rodadero to behold the scene of so strange an occurrence. So we spent the day in conversation, and, which was more interesting to my companions, in exploring the maze of chambers and passages and winding galleries which the labour of many thousands of men had wrought out of the solid rock in the days of my ancestors, for you must know that in those days the fortress of the Sascahuaman was crowned with a great palace, which was the strongest place in all the Land of the Four Regions, and so here were stored very great treasures, not only of gold and silver and precious stones, but also weapons and armour and most finely-woven cloths of the purest wool of the Vicuña, which is softer than silk, brilliantly dyed and embroidered with gems and threads of gold, and the Imperial robes that had been worn by twenty generations of Incas, many sets for each, since nothing that had belonged to one Inca might ever be used by another after his death.



And soon they came back to us into the throne-room clad exactly alike

Among these we found many sets of the royal robes of the Coyas, or queen-wives of the Incas, and I took Golden Star aside and told her to take two of these and to clothe herself in one and Joyful Star in the other, so that we might see our two Inca princesses side by side as they might have looked in the days of the past, and she fell in with my humour, laughing and clapping her hands like a delighted child.



I stooped and kissed her brow.

So she took the robes and led Joyful Star away with her to their own chamber, talking to her in her soft, musical speech, though she knew she could not understand her, and yet making so many pretty signs and eloquent gestures that Ruth, forgetting her sorrow for the time, comprehended her and entered into the spirit of the play, and soon they came back to us into the throne-room clad exactly alike, and so perfectly resembling each other, save for the contrast of the blue eyes and the brown and the bright hair and the dark, that they could have been taken for nothing save twin daughters of the Sun and the fairest of his children; and Tupac and the two men that I had kept in the fortress to attend to our wants fell on their knees before them as they passed, as though they would have worshipped them.

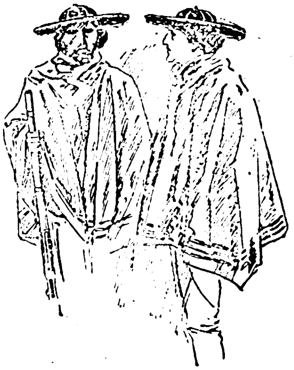
It was at this time and while we were passing the hours in this fashion that Golden Star did something that gave me great joy and a bright hope for the future. I had been telling her of the wonderful country that I had returned to life in, and of the marvellous things that I had seen there, and this, she knew already, was the country of Francis Hartness. So, as he came from such a wonderful land, she thought, in the innocence of her old-world simplicity, that he was one of a new race of beings that had been born on earth since our days, and when I told her that he was but human like ourselves, though very strong and learned, and skilled in many things that we knew nothing of, she said to me, just as a sister might say to a brother from whom she had no secrets:

"He is rather, in my eyes, like a son of our Father who has come to earth from the Mansions of the Sun; yet I am very glad that he is not, and that he is a man such as you are, my brother, and when Joyful Star has taught me the speech of her people I will talk with him, and then I think life will be better for me, for even now, though I cannot understand his words, his voice sounds like music to me, and when he looks at me he makes me try to remember something that was in my other life, and I have forgotten. What is it, I wonder?"

I looked down into her eyes and saw the untroubled serenity of her soul reflected in them. There was no flush on her cheeks, and her lips were smiling as they could not have smiled had she known how I could have answered that question for her. I stooped and kissed her brow, and said:

"I might guess what it is, Golden Star, but I could not tell you. Yet I pray that our Father of the Sun may put it into the heart of my friend to teach you what I see now you can only learn from him."

More than this I would not tell her, though she questioned me sharply. But the next time that Francis Hartness spoke to her, through my lips, she looked up at him, and a little flush came to her cheeks, and a smile to her lips, and I saw his eyes brighten, and the colour deepen ever so little in his bronzed cheeks.


I had disguised him as well as I could to make him look like an Indian.

Then I looked at Joyful Star, and saw something shining in her eyes, too, and as she caught my glance she smiled ever so little, and said, when I had finished speaking for him:

"Vilcaroya is an excellent interpreter, I've no doubt, but don't you think, Captain Hartness, it would be very much more interesting if you could talk directly with Her Highness? You know I'm teaching Golden Star English, and Vilcaroya is teaching you Quichua—now I wonder which of you will be able to talk to the other first?"

He pulled his moustache and laughed, looking at Golden Star the while, and said:

"Well, Her Highness has the advantage of the easier language and the freshest, and I dare say the brightest intellect, but probably, for all that, we shall begin with some delightful jargon of both languages, and leave them to sort themselves out as we go on. Still, as you say, it will be more interesting than talking through an interpreter."

"And I hope," she said, with more meaning in her voice than in her words, "that you will both of you find it as pleasant as interesting."

"Who knows!" he said, catching her meaning and laughing again. "She is most wonderfully like you, Miss Ruth, isn't she?"

"Yes, but—but I am not without hope that you may some day compare us a little, just a little to my disadvantage."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE DAY.

WHAT Francis Hartness would have said to this I cannot say, though I do not think he was displeased by Joyful Star's words, and yet his face grew very serious as she spoke. But just then Tupac came and told me that Anahuac and Ainu had returned with the beasts, and were now waiting outside the bronze doors. From this we learnt that it was already night, though, truth to tell, the time had passed so quickly for us that I for one thought that it was little more than late afternoon.

Now, as I have said, I was the only one who knew the secret of the bronze doors, and so I went back with Tupac and opened them, and, when the men had entered, closed them again.

There were twelve of them beside Ainu and Anahuac, and all were laden with food and drink and clothing, and our arms and ammunition, two repeating rifles and two revolvers for each of us. When the men had laid their burdens down, I called Anahuac to me, and asked him if he had any news. He bowed himself before me, and then, standing in front of me as I sat in one of the seats, he said:

"Yes, lord. If the ears of the Son of the Sun are open, his servant will fill them with tidings of some moment."

"Say on," I said, "and meanwhile let a meal be prepared for us, for we are hungry."

This I said to Tupac, and Golden Star, hearing it, smiled, and took Ruth's hand and led her to the boxes, making signs that they should perform the housewife's duties together. Then Anahuac began, and said:

"The ears of the Children of the Blood have not been closed, nor have their eyes slept throughout the Holy City and the Valley of the Sun, and they have seen and heard much, and the courage of their hearts has risen high, and they are longing for the word of their Lord to break the yoke that is upon their necks.

"When the soldiers returned last night and told the story that my Lord had put into their mouths, there was great wonder among all the soldiers, and many saw in it a sign that the Son of the Sun is powerful, and can do that which he promises. But among the masters who are set over the soldiers there was great anger, and they sought, but without avail, to keep the news from being made public in the city; but the Men of the Blood took care that this should not be so, and to-day all Cuzco has been talking of the strange fate of the Coronel Prada, the son of Don Antonio Prada, the Governor. But Don Antonio himself had gone the day before to a hacienda near Oropesa, and messengers have been sent to him to tell him the story, and this evening he rode back with all haste to the city.

"He has ordered that to-night sentries shall be posted at all the approaches to the Rodadero and round the Sayacusca, so that none may come or go without his knowledge, and to-morrow he will come himself with many officers and two hundred soldiers and the thing they call dynamite, that he may rend the Sayacusca in pieces, and find, as he thinks, the place where his son has been hidden."

"And the soldiers, what of them?" I asked. "Will they be for us or against us?"

"There will be many in the service of my Lord, and if it shall be possible there shall be more of these than of the others, for those who were in the Hall of Gold last night have been busy, in the hope of my Lord's further bounty, and many have been tempted with the promise of gold and freedom; but still there will be many that may not be trusted, and all the officers of the Governor will be Spaniards."

"And therefore enemies," I said, when he had finished his story, and stood waiting for me to speak.

I told Francis Hartness at once what Anahuac had said, and we debated for a short time on what we should do. Then I called Tupac, and he came and stood beside Anahuac, and I said to them:

"These things have happened well for us, and now we must act quickly, so that we may take the best advantage of them. When you go hence, take with you twenty strips of the scarlet fringe in token of my authority, and give these to twenty of the best of the Men of the Blood, and let them go with all speed and silence through the towns and villages of the valley, and say that the Son of the Sun has come, and is about to stretch forth his hand and take that which was his again. Further, let every entrance to the valley be closed. Let the bridge over the Great Speaker be cut with all speed that may be. Let none pass in or out of the gateway of Piquillacta, and let all the mountain paths be broken down or blocked, so that none may know what is happening in the valley, nor any news be carried hence into the country.

"Let every hacienda, whose master is a Spaniard, be given to the flames, but let no one else be injured. Let none of the strangers be hurt, and let their goods be sacred. Let all of the sentries who will not serve us be disarmed or slain silently by the others, and this before midnight, and let those who are with us who shall come with the Governor to-morrow make ready to do quickly that which shall be commanded them. The password for those who are with us will be 'Vilcaroya.' The rest I will do with my own hands and the help of my friend. I have spoken, let me be obeyed quickly!"

Then they bent low before me and went to make ready to do what I had bidden them.

It was then about eight o'clock at night, and after we had had our evening meal we waited until it was nearly eleven, making perfect our plans, and then, when Ruth and Golden Star had gone to rest without knowing of the work which we had in hand—for we had kept it from them lest they should be anxious for us—Francis Hartness and I armed ourselves, after I had disguised him as well as I could to make him look like an Indian, and we said good-night to the Professor and left the fortress by the same way that we had left it the night before.

As soon as we got out into the open air we made our way stealthily back towards the Rodadero, until I caught sight of a sentry standing near one of the carved stones.

"I will go and see whether that is a friend or a foe," I whispered. "You wait here and cover him with your rifle, but do not fire unless you hear me whistle."

"Very well," he said; "but take care of yourself, for those Mannlicher bullets make a very ugly wound."

I waved my hand to him in reply, and went away towards the sentry, keeping a good look out for others who might be about. I had in my belt a long, heavy-bladed knife, and this I loosened in the sheath as I came near to him. I got within earshot of him unseen, and then, rising to my feet behind him, I said in a low voice, but loud enough for him to hear:

"Vilcaroya—friend or foe?"

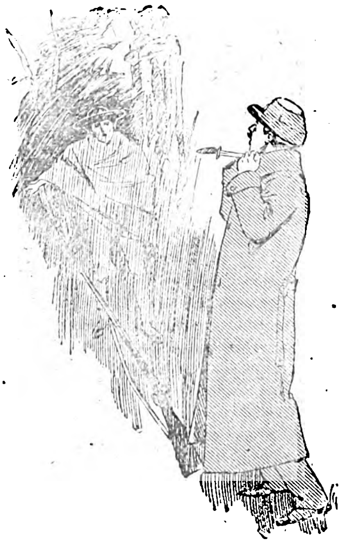
"*Halta! quien va?*"

The words in the hated Spanish speech told me that he was a foe. As he faced about, bringing his rifle to the ready, I drew my knife, and before he could take aim, sent it whistling through the air with such force and so true an aim, that it took him in the windpipe and half buried its blade in his neck. That was one of the tricks of our old warfare which, with many others, I had taken good care not to forget.

He dropped his rifle and clasped his hands to his throat and fell without a sound. I crept swiftly forward, pulled the knife out of his throat and drove it into his heart. Then I quickly took off his cartridge belt and long coat and cap, and put them on. Then I took his rifle and stood in his place for a little while, so that the others might see me, and then walked back to where I had left Hartness. When he saw me coming, his rifle-barrel moved till it covered me, and he said in English:

"Is that you, Vilcaroya?"

"Yes," I said. "The sentry was an enemy, and I have killed him. Now I am going to take you prisoner, as though I were the sentry, and so we can go together and find the officer who commands the sentries, and take him prisoner or kill him."



He dropped his rifle and clasped his hands to his throat.

"All right," he said with a laugh. "I surrender. This isn't quite what we call civilised warfare, but I suppose it can't be helped."

We went back together to the place where the sentry that I had killed had stood, and then we saw two or three others coming in towards the place, no doubt to see why the other sentry should have left his post. I took Hartness' rifle out of his hand, and, catching him by the arm, led him to meet the nearest of them, as though I had taken a prisoner. Within ten paces of them I halted, and said:

"Is it Vilcaroya or Prada?"

"Vilcaroya to a friend, Prada to an enemy," he answered, in the dialect in which I had addressed him.

"Then we are friends?" I said, taking off the peaked cap that had belonged to the other sentry, and showing him the long straight brown hair that betokened my race. "I am he who has come back from the days that are dead—Vilcaroya, the son of Huayni-Capac."

"And I am thy servant, Lord," he said, bringing his rifle butt down between his feet, and bending his head over the muzzle. "I am one of those who saw the glory of my Lord in the Hall of Gold last night."

"Then thou art one who can be trusted," I said, "for none have betrayed the secret or earned the swift death that would have been theirs had they done so. Now tell me how many of those who are on guard here to-night may be trusted."

"There are twenty of us, Lord, here, not counting the officer in command."

"Nay," I said, interrupting him, "there are but nineteen, for he who wore this coat and carried this rifle was an enemy, and I have killed him, as I would have killed thee hadst thou been an enemy. Now, of these nineteen, how many may I trust?"

"There are but five who may not be trusted, not counting the officer, and he is a Spaniard, and must be killed."

"That is good," I said, for the tone in which he had said these last words had pleased me well. "Now this man with me is my faithful friend, and one who will fight well for me and my people. Go on the other side of him, and we will take him as a prisoner to the officer. Then thou shalt see how Vilcaroya deals with his enemies."

He bent his head in assent, and took his place beside Hartness, and as we marched away Hartness said to me:

"I don't think I shall have much to teach you in strategy, Vilcaroya, but I must say that I would rather have a stand-up fight than this kind of thing."

"It is not like what you have told me of the warfare of the English," I said, "but here it is necessary, as you will see. Yet I will not ask you to shed blood as I shall shed it."

"Very well," he said, "if it has to be it must be. Let us get it over."

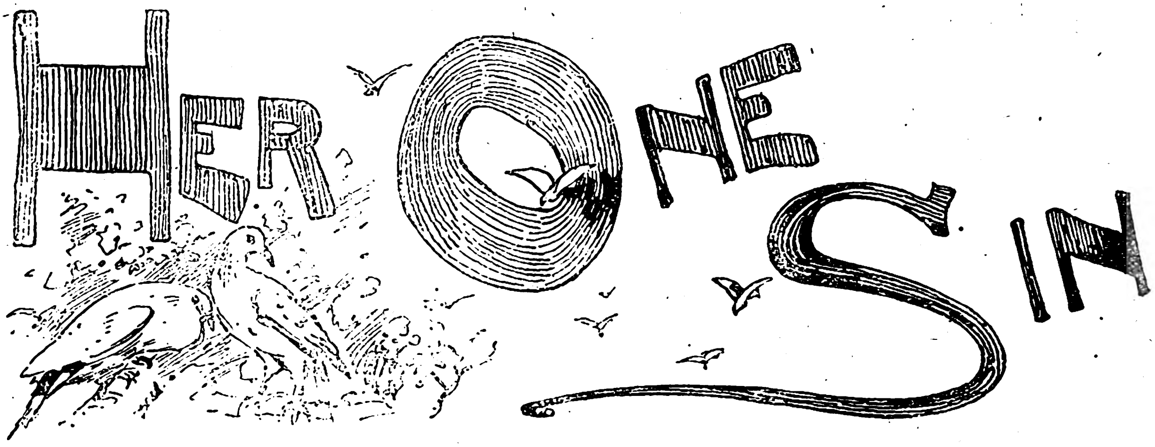
So we marched him between us across the plain, and when we got between the wall of the fortress and the carved stone that they called the Inca's Seat, we saw the officer who was in command of the sentries, walking with two soldiers beside him from post to post, seeing that the sentries were awake and keeping proper watch. We went to meet him, and halted ten paces from him at his command. I had told the sentry to reply for me, and he answered the officer's hail and said:

"Vilcaroya!—a prisoner."

As the first words left his lips the two soldiers repeated the password and made with their rifles the movement that is called the salute. My knife was already in my hand, and as the officer gave a command in Spanish, it flashed once in the starlight and the next instant was buried to the hilt in his breast. He fell, as the sentry had done, without a cry, for it had smitten him to the heart, dead, as though he had been struck by a lightning bolt. The others stared at his fallen body, dumb with amazement, and I heard Hartness utter a sound that might have been one either of horror or of wonder, but I had no time to take heed of this, so I instantly ordered the two soldiers to take the officer's uniform off his body, and then I said to Hartness:

"Now, you can speak Spanish, and I cannot. Take this Spaniard's uniform and his weapons, and make yourself the officer of the guard, and then you shall help me to set a trap that the Governor shall find it a hard matter to escape from."

(*To be continued.*)

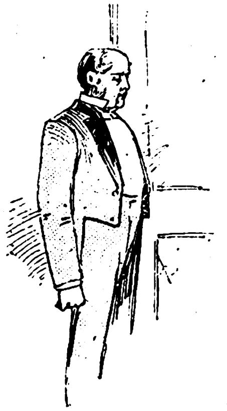


HER ONE SIN

"POOR old chap, I knew what it would be if you went; I told you that you'd be bored to death with them, they are like a pair of turtle-doves."

I was speaking to my friend Alder, who in a moment of rashness had promised my cousin to visit him and his wife. They had just pulled through a spell of very black days indeed, and as matters righted themselves suddenly, they decided to renew the happy days of their honeymoon, much to the discomfiture of their friends and acquaintances.

"Yes, I suppose it was irksome," said Alder, dreamily turning with a sigh from the bay window, from which he had been watching the moonlight throwing wavering shadows on the snow.



"Yes, I suppose it was," he repeated; then suddenly: "but you told me that Dick forgot that appearances are often misleading, and that she could furnish no satisfactory explanation of her conduct, didn't you? Happily it has all ended well, however, but her voice and manners reminded me of a page in the life of a friend of mine. If the story would interest you, you shall have it after dinner."

"Most certainly it would," said I, for Alder's tales are always worth hearing. Accordingly, when we were sitting one on each side of the fire after dinner, he commenced:

"It is many years since it all happened, still I believe I remember the facts fairly well," then with a wan smile, "I cannot possibly do the story justice, and probably you will have guessed the sad end before I have reached it.

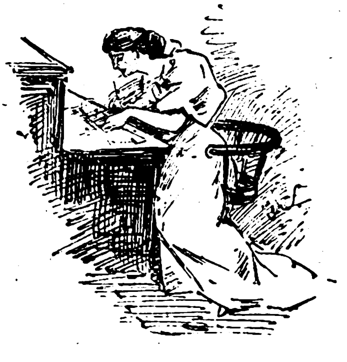
"My friend, whom we will call Carr, had been of material service to a man when out in India, and one day while out hunting this man met with a serious accident which in two or three days caused his death. His servant and Carr nursed him through his short illness, and then it was that the stranger gave him the unpleasant task of breaking the news of his death to his wife.

"Accordingly, upon Carr's return to England he fulfilled his mission. The widow was quite a young woman and very beautiful, and Carr became hopelessly fascinated by her charms. Her late husband had been a regular scoundrel, and their marriage had been anything but a success, so after the usual lapse of time she married Carr.

"The first three years of their married life was one long dream of happiness, so, like Tom and his wife, they may have been a bore to their friends.

"It was too good to last.

"Money and jewellery had been missing for the last few months, and at last Carr traced the theft to the butler, whom he instantly dismissed without a character. This measure was taken at the suggestion of my friend's wife.



"One night when Carr returned home from business he found his wife sitting at his desk in the library. She had opened it with a skeleton key, and in her hand she held a roll of banknotes.

"There she sat cowering like a whipped hound before its master, with guilt written on every feature of her face, shivering like a coward.

"Carr, anxious to find some excuse for his darling, tried to console himself with the thought that it was for some relative in distress; but no relative of hers was in want of money. No, it was only for herself. And yet had she not had everything she wanted, for nothing was ever denied her.

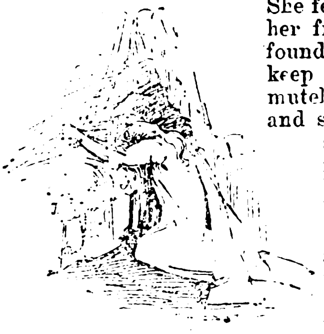
"Had she not permitted the servant to suffer in her stead he might have passed this over. As far as possible Carr made restitution to the man.

"In one way, and only one could he explain the matter, and that was that his wife was a kleptomaniac. Never before had he believed in kleptomania, but now, well, what could he do otherwise than believe—it was forced upon him. This horrible disease was ever before him, his mind became fixed on it. She even confessed that she had at times felt impelled to take valuables for which she could not possibly have any use.

"The discovery tortured him night and day. Had he not regarded his wife and child, and himself also as being of a finer type than most people? Now he was completely disillusioned. Now he dared not leave her for an instant, in case the evil desire might return. Pocketing his pride, he explained the true state of things to her maid, and together they watched her, never leaving her unattended for a minute.

"This in itself was a gross piece of cruelty—cruelty that must have cut her to the quick and hurt her pride most sorely. At that time Carr felt it his duty to act as judge and to see that his sentence was carried out to the word.

"If for one single moment she forgot her past sin, and turned to Carr for sympathy, sternly, very sternly did he rebuke her.



"No word of reproach or complaint did she utter, but drearily and sadly accepted the penalty of her crime. She feared that he would send her from him, but when she found it part of his plan to keep constantly near her, she mutely obeyed his every word, and seemed content. Nor did she, or rather would she, for a single instant believe that Carr's love had been forfeited.

"She gave herself up altogether to the child, who was a constant source of anxiety and trouble to Carr. If the poor little one took a sweet or a cake that was not his, Carr, with his heated imagination, was seized with a terrible and overwhelming fear that he had inherited his mother's sin.

"One night, just as Carr was about to retire, his wife came in hurriedly and told him to send for a doctor as the child was ill. Carr left the room.

"All the ordinary remedies she tried without avail, and then raising her frightened, tear-stained eyes to him in mute appeal she lifted the child in her arms.

"At length he told her in a strained voice that he had not sent for the doctor as it was better for the child to die!

"Fool that he was; he did not think that he could err. He told himself that it was better to get it over than to have to go through that awful misery of seeing his son a thief.

"For a few moments the mother was nearly mad with grief and indignation; then, quietly placing the child in its bed, she watched the deathly, waxen pallor creep over his fair young face, and the little form, whose growth she had tended with such jealous care and love, grow stiff and cold and solemn in death. Then with one long-drawn cry she fell on her knees and sobbed as if her very heart were broken!"

It was two or three minutes before Alder spoke again, and when at last he raised his head he continued in a hard, hurried manner:

"The mother weakened visibly after the death of her child, and in this case the physicians *were* called in. There was no illness, simply a fading away, a growing weakness and a want of will to live. It was soon finished, and within two months of the boy's death the mother went to join her darling.

"The day after her death a note came for her addressed by a strange hand. Carr could hardly open it, for his mind would wander to that poor cold body upstairs. The letter was supposed to be from her first husband, whom Carr had helped to bury, and cautioned her that if his monthly allowance did not turn up, he would have to inform Carr of her double marriage. It was a pity he had not done so already, as Carr would have recognised him as the stranger's servant.

"The poor woman's sin was more than explained, and she had paid for it in full.

"Well, old man, you'd better be off to bed now; I will sit up for a bit and think; that is about all there is of the tale; I hope I haven't worried you with it."

Then I spoke for the first time.

"Is not Carr tired of life?"

"Yes, he is!" was the simple answer.

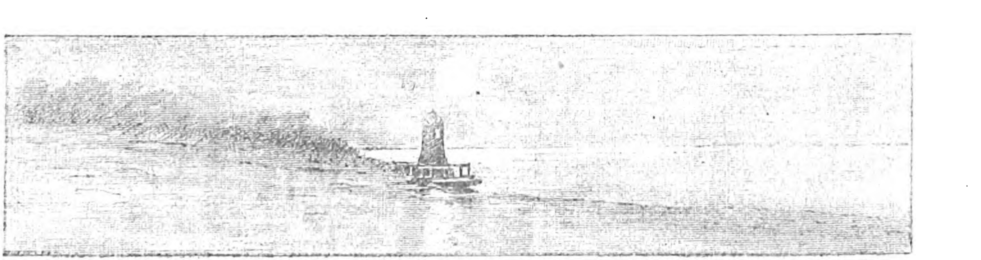
"Good-night." Then I left him.

That night I thought I heard him murmuring in his sleep. After a time I got up and listened.

"Aless darling, will you, can you forgive me? Yes—yes—she does. Her hands are held out to me——I——I come—Aless, I——"

I waited for half an hour, and then the suspense was too great; lighting a candle I crept through the door to his bedside, and there he lay with a happy smile on his face—dead.

M. FARRES.



THE COMMUNIST'S FATE

"AND so Roblard is going back to France," remarked one of the circle of exiles who were discussing the amnesty at the Café du Nord of Geneva."

"He will never set foot on French territory again," responded another, with a shake of the head.

"But he has been pardoned," said the first speaker, taking up a copy of the *Journal Officiel*, and scoring a mark with his thumb under the name of Antoine Roblard.

"No matter," was the answer, given with more emphasis than before. "Roblard has been amnestied by the Government; but he must get pardoned by other persons before his exile can end; and the persons in question are not forgiving. If Roblard returned to France he would be murdered."

"What are you saying there?" chorused all the Communists round the table; but the speaker, a journalist named Vuilleux, finished his absinthe and took leave of the company with a wink, having vouchsafed no explanations. The next moment a slim, sallow, and careworn man entered the café with some books under his arm, and was demonstratively, almost affectionately, greeted by the men whom Vuilleux had just left. He was hailed by his name of Roblard, and congratulated upon his pardon. "Well, Antoine," cried one, "I suppose you will be leaving us in a day or two?"

"Yes," answered Roblard, "and glad I shall be to get back to Paris after eight years of absence."

"It is to Paris you are going, then?"

"Yes, to-morrow morning by the first train, so I shall wish you good-bye on leaving presently."

"Say to us '*Au revoir!*'" cried one of the Communists, lifting his glass. "May the day come when we shall meet in Paris and take our *revanche* of 1871!"

"*Au revoir!*" answered Roblard gravely, as he raised his glass of beer to his lips. He half emptied it, and then sat down and chatted for half-an-hour on the political topics of the day. He was known to be writing a "History of the Commune," and he remarked that he was glad his exile was going to end, chiefly because he wanted to have access again to the public libraries of Paris.

After this he expressed his opinions cheerily about Grévy, Waddington, and Gambetta; stated his belief that he—Roblard—should soon find a seat in the Chamber of Deputies, and that he would then pitch into the "Moderates." Finally he shook hands with every one of the exiles, saying a friendly word to each, and took his departure.

When he was gone a discussion arose between some who contended that there was an unusual look about Roblard, and others who maintained that they had found him just the same as ever. One of these latter, meeting Vuilleux, the journalist, later in the evening, said: "You were all wrong about Roblard; he is going back to France fast enough. He starts to-morrow."

"Ah!" exclaimed Vuilleux, with a slight arching of his eyebrows. "Then he will be a dead man before a month is over."

"You are alluding to some projected duel, I suppose?" rejoined the other. "Perhaps you mean to kill him yourself?"

"Roblard will not die in a duel," replied Vuilleux significantly, "but he *will* die within a month. You mark my words."

* * * * *

Twenty-four hours after this, just as dusk was gathering over Paris, and the policemen at the Préfecture de Police were lighting up that big establishment with gas, a cab, loaded with luggage, which had arrived from the Lyons railway station, drew up on the quay that skirts the Palace of Justice, and Antoine Roblard alighted from it.

He passed quickly under the archway which leads to the Préfecture, and entering the first open door in the office, asked if he could see Monsieur A——, mentioning one of the chiefs of the political department of the police. The inspector on duty took his card, and handed it to a messenger, who disappeared for a few minutes and then returned, begging Roblard to walk upstairs.

The pardoned Communist followed his guide, who conducted him up a broad flight of stairs thickly carpeted with cocoa-nut matting, and ushered him into an office, where a grey-haired functionary with a very firm mouth and a pair of keen eyes, whose brightness was concealed by *pince-nez*, sat writing.

Monsieur A. was a Republican, and he and Roblard had known each other intimately in old days when they had been fellow journalists together on an opposition paper which made a train at "ramming" at the Government journals. The police official did not affect to be unmindful of this bygone acquaintanceship, but held out his hand to the returned exile, saying: "I am glad to see you back Roblard; what can we do for you?"

"I want you to save my life," said Roblard, sitting down unbidden, and lowering his voice. "I am in danger of assassination."

"Explain the matter," replied Monsieur A., incredulously; and he narrowly watched the Communist's features. The pale face, dark, sparkling eyes, dry voice, and general feverishness of manner, were such as may be often seen in melancholic madmen, labouring under a fixed hallucination. Roblard noticed the glance that was fixed upon him, and caught the tone of doubt in his interlocutor's words; but he paid no heed to them.

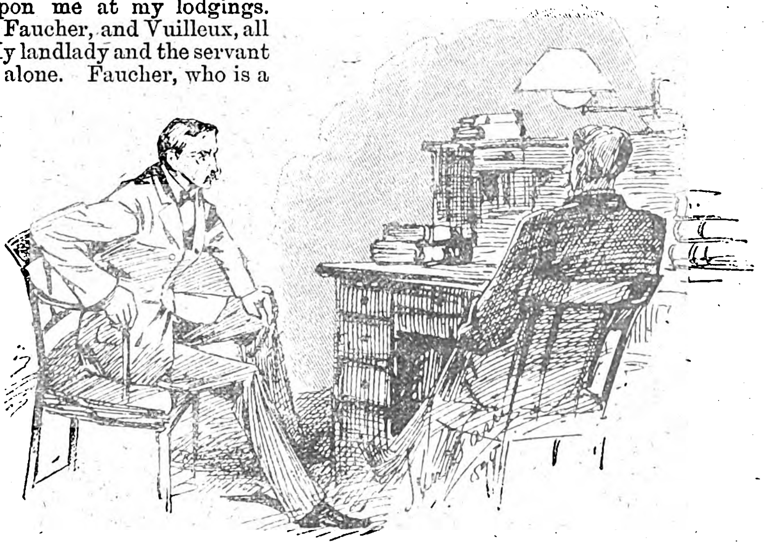
"You know what was the crime alleged against me?" he asked.

"Yes; you were sentenced to death for having instigated the shooting of the banker Y—— under the Commune. However, as you had escaped to London before Paris fell into the power of the Versaillists you were never arrested; and, on the whole, you have escaped pretty cheaply."

"Well," continued Roblard, speaking lower than before and looking Monsieur A. steadfastly in the face, "I have been accused of shooting Y——from motives of private malice, and for the purpose of robbing him."

"Who accused you—the prosecution?"

"No, our people—some of my fellow Communists," replied Roblard with a kind of gasp, which was meant to be one of indignation, but which sounded like fear. "I had been in London about a month, when one night three men called upon me at my lodgings. They were Dorrielle, Faucher, and Vuilleux, all three my enemies. My landlady and the servant were out, so I was all alone. Faucher, who is a kind of revolutionary fanatic, began to abuse me, saying I had brought disgrace on the Commune cause, and had been playing the game of the Bonapartists by shooting Y——, who knew all the ins and outs of the Mexican expedition, and held documents damaging to the Empire, which he would have published had he lived. Then Dorrielle spoke out, taxing me with having seized all Y——'s securities and valuables, and having appropriated them to my own use; just as if Y—— would have been silly enough to keep his money within reach of looters under such a *régime* as ours."



"To hang me with," rejoined Roblard hoarsely, as if the mere recollection of the affair strangled him.

"By the way, was it really you who had Y—— shot?" inquired the police official carelessly.

"That is beside the question," answered Roblard, on his guard. "All I can say is, that these three enemies of mine took it for granted I had done so, and when they had finished abusing me, Vuilleux pulled a rope out of his pocket."

"A rope! What was that for?"

"To hang me with," rejoined Roblard hoarsely, as if the mere recollection of the affair strangled him. "They announced that they had sentenced me to death, and that they would hang me out of hand. My death, said they, would look like a suicide. Well, they did hang me——"

"Come, come," expostulated Monsieur A——, doubtful whether the Communist was romancing or speaking from hallucination, yet bethinking himself that somehow the man might be telling the truth after all.

"They did hang me," repeated Roblard impressively. "It was all in vain that I struggled, screamed, and prayed for justice; I was forced on to my knees and a handkerchief was stuffed into my mouth. Then those three butchers passed a halter over my neck and strung me up to a curtain rod. I suppose, however, that they must have made off pretty fast, for less than a quarter of an hour afterwards (having lost consciousness in the meanwhile) I was cut down by my landlady and the servant, who had returned. Both these poor women concluded I had tried to make away with myself."

"Of course, though, you went and lodged a complaint with the police?"

"No; what would have been the use of it?" returned Roblard, with a shrug. "My enemies had taken their precaution so well that I should not have been believed, and the English magistrates would either have put me into a madhouse, or have sent me to prison for having tried to commit suicide, contrary to their laws. Besides, on the day after this affair I received an anonymous letter, enigmatically worded, but from which I gathered that, as I had escaped the halter, I should be allowed to live, provided I did not return to France. Dorrielle, Faucher, and Vuilleux condemned me to perpetual exile."

"Have you this letter with you?" asked Monsieur A——, who seemed more and more doubtful about Roblard's story.

"Yes, here it is," said the Communist, and he handed his interlocutor a strip of creased paper, on which the latter read:

"You have got luckily cured of your sore throat, but for such a delicate constitution as yours the climate of France will not do. Keep clear of the country for your own sake, or there will be a relapse."

"Humph!" muttered the police official. "And have you seen your enemies since the event you relate?"

"Yes; I have seen Vuilleux frequently at Geneva," replied Roblard, in agitation; "but there is the horror of the thing. Whenever I spoke to him of his attempt on me, he said he did not know what I meant, and hinted that I was a monomaniac. I half got to believe that I was so myself, and that prevented me from ever speaking on this subject to others."

Monsieur A—— rubbed his head. Roblard's narrative might be true or untrue; anyhow, it was expedient to have the man watched, in order to protect him from others if he were really in danger, or against himself if he were insane. After a few moments' reflection, the police official said: "Well, Roblard, I will lend you one of my detectives, who shall be your companion until you feel safe. He is quite a new man; nobody knows him, so that you will not be compromised if seen in his society."

"Thank you, A——," said Roblard, with a sigh. "Fancy my needing the protection of the police! However, I will pay your man whatever is wanted; he must be absolutely at my disposal, like a servant."

"You have grown rich, then?" asked Monsieur A—— with a smile.

"No, but I make some money by my books," rejoined the Communist, colouring.

"So much the better," continued the official in the same vein of banter; then, suddenly changing his tone: "I say, Roblard, tell me the truth; what became of Y——'s papers, for they were never found."

"How can I tell?" queried Roblard, with a scowl. "I suppose you, too, will accuse me of having taken them. Do I look like a robber?"

"No; but now I come to think of it, you have been leading a pretty expensive life in your exile," replied Monsieur A—— pointedly. "You have travelled all over America and the Continent; you have been subscribing to so-called patriotic funds. We have even had to stop a gift of money which you had sent to some political convicts in New Caledonia. All that is pretty well for an author, eh?"

"Possibly. But authors are not beggars in these days," answered Roblard evasively. He was irritated, and Monsieur A—— did not think fit to pursue the subject. He left the room, and having rung for the detective about whom he had spoken to Roblard—a sleepy-looking, middle-aged man named Trouillot—gave that worthy his instructions. He wound up by whispering: "My own belief is that M. Roblard is mad, so that you will have to keep your eyes about you."

"Very good, sir," answered Trouillot laconically.

Roblard and Trouillot left the Préfecture together in a cab; and the Communist appeared to be in rather high spirits during their drive to an hotel. A load seemed to have been lifted from his mind, and he talked with excitement about the changes he had noticed in Paris, saying how glad he was to get back again. At the hotel he bespoke two bedrooms next each other, and having a door of communication; then he ordered dinner.

By this time his spirits had somewhat fallen, and he watched his companion through the corner of his eyes as if he did not quite like the look of him. Trouillot was one of those men who cannot talk, and whose faces do not say much in their favour. He kept on saying: "Yes, sir," stolidly; and during dinner ate and drank largely.

Nothing of consequence happened during the evening. Roblard was tired with his journey from Geneva, and after the pair had discussed a cup of coffee and a cigar in the smoking-room, he suggested bed. Both men repaired to their sleeping-chambers, and Roblard began by requesting that Trouillot would leave the door of communication between the two apartments open.

Trouillot consented, but he was rather dismayed when he saw the Communist prepare for his night's rest by laying on his night table a six-chambered revolver and a large clasp-knife. He vowed to himself that he would sleep as gendarmes are said to do—with one eye open; but this resolution was soon obliterated by drowsiness, the effects of the good dinner he had eaten. Ten minutes after getting between sheets, Trouillot was sound asleep, and snoring like a trombone.

He awoke in the middle of the night, and recollected where he was; but a peculiar odour was filling his nostrils. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. The room was pitch dark. He struck a match, and the first thing he saw after lighting his candle was a handkerchief (lying on his pillow), which had evidently been steeped in chloroform. The pungent smell of that poison still lingered about it.

This discovery at once drew Trouillot out of bed, and he strode trouserless into the next room, holding his candle at arm's length. At first he could see nothing unusual; but suddenly his eyes met a sight which made him stand stock still in the middle of the apartment. Deep in the alcove, and half hidden by its curtains, hung the lifeless body of Roblard, who was suspended by the neck to the curtain rod by means of the bell rope. He was quite dead; and the surprising part of the matter was that the door of his room opening on to the passage stood ajar!

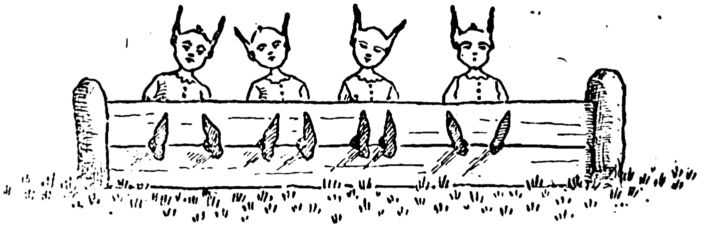
* * * * *

A few hours later, when a summary inquest had been held by the Procureur de la République, that functionary said: "It is obviously the suicide of a cunning madman."

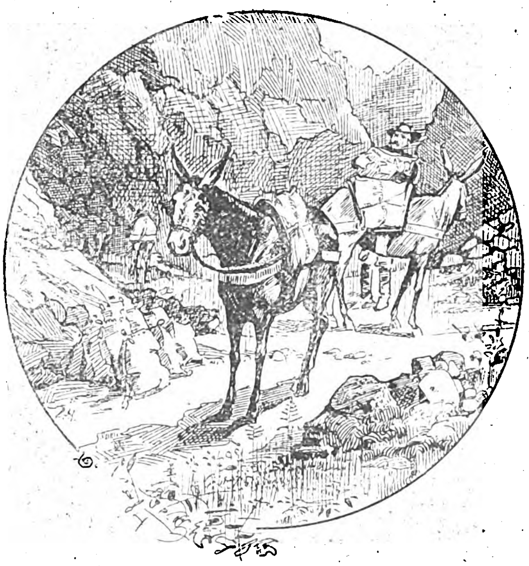
"I suppose so," concurred Monsieur A——, who had been called in. "Yet those conspirators are queer fellows; they cannot even die plainly like other men."

The same evening Vuilleux, the journalist, reading the Parisian telegrams in a Geneva newspaper, remarked to a circle of affrighted Communists: "Didn't I tell you Roblard's days were numbered? He was bound to end in that fashion."

Le Vier.



TAKING NO CHANCES.



THERE it lay. Right on the mountain top. Nature had hollowed out, as if on purpose, a space not more than fifty feet square; and in it she had placed gold in quantities that few men ever see and fewer still possess.

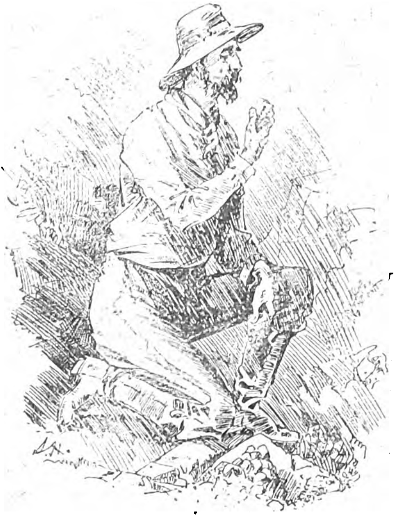
Amid the sand and in the crevices of the rocky ledges that made the apex of the mountain, a novice might have passed it by unheedingly. But when Jack Swilling and his comrades saw it they knew that they were rich, that in the gold that lay before them was a new life, wherein that gold would buy them the smiles and caresses of women, the homage and subservience of men—a life of music, of feasting, and of song.

It was for this that they had toiled for years, and had risked everything that men hold dear. And now it had come to them, unexpectedly and by accident. Attracted by the discovery of rich gold-diggings at Weaver, in the then recently organised territory of Arizona, the little party had left Tucson and travelled northward.

On their arrival at the mines, they found that already a good many thousands of dollars had been taken out, principally by Mexicans, and they had no difficulty in finding ground that paid them well. For nearly a month they had continued mining, meeting with no more than usual success, until one of their party, while hunting, had ascended one of the surrounding mountains.

On reaching the summit he had paused for an instant to let his eyes sweep the mesas and mountains that stretched away for miles on either side, and, while doing so, he had discovered that the little basin in which he stood was almost paved with gold. Picking up a few of the larger pieces, he returned to camp and informed his comrades of his discovery.

The story he told his companions was one so incredible that, had it not been for the nuggets of gold which he had brought with him they would not have believed him. Early the next morning the entire party ascended the mountain, and what they saw proved that the richness of the find had not been exaggerated, but that its true value had been, if anything, under-estimated.



Picking up a few of the larger pieces.

Abandoning their old place, the party encamped on their newly-discovered treasure-ground and began to gather its riches. At first every loose nugget was carefully picked up and stored away; after that the sand, which was found to be heavy with fine gold, was gathered together preparatory to "washing" it out with the waters of the stream below.

This done, they began with their bowie knives to "cut and gouge" out of the crevices and cracks of the rock the gold that they contained. Never did men work so hard. The feverish hunger and thirst was upon them. As long as the light of day lasted they continued to work. Each day saw the pile of virgin gold grow larger and larger, until it became impossible to conceal it.

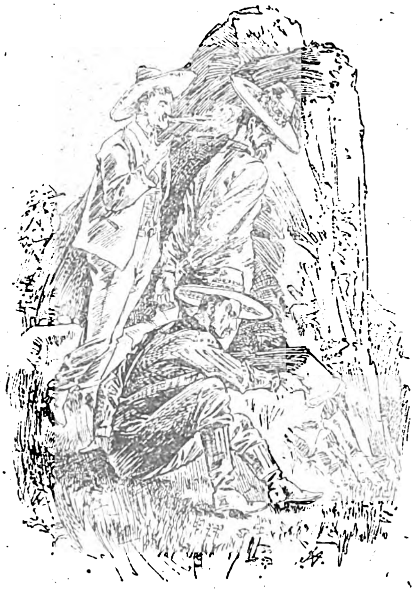
The Mexicans, who had been their neighbours in the old diggings, would come into their camp and look with greedy eyes at the Americans at work. At first they sought everywhere to discover another such pocket, but in vain. Beyond the little piece of ground where the first party had "struck it," the mountain side was as barren of gold as a macadamised road. Then they ceased to prospect, and spent their time sullenly watching the taking out of the riches in which they were to have no share.

It was only when dusk glistened with its myriad of stars that they returned to their own camp, to toss restlessly through the night, feverishly anxious to see what new riches the morrow would bring. The gold their own work had taken from the banks of the stream, with which they were once so satisfied, seemed so little and insignificant when compared with what their neighbours had found on the mountain top, that they no longer thought or spoke of it. Once it had seemed to them like a fortune, now it was hardly worth having.

Day after day the Americans worked, watched by the Mexicans. From a few dollars the value of their gold grew into hundreds and then into thousands. They could not tell how much they had, for they had no means of weighing it. They had more than all of them together could carry. The strongest man amongst them, Jack Swilling, six feet and over, could not shift the gold from one place to another without making five separate loads of it.

As the store of gold grew, the friendship that had once existed between the Americans and the Mexicans became weaker and weaker. Soon they were enemies, watching one another with hatred that none attempted to disguise.

The Americans no longer slept together in a little group, as had been their custom. Instead, each took his blanket and went off alone, yet not so far but that he was near the gold. While at work during the day, they made it a point never to group together. Even when a nugget larger than the rest was picked up they no longer joyously called to each other that they might gather together to admire it. They were always on their guard, taking no chances. Day and night, one of their party watched the Mexicans.



Then they ceased to prospect and spent their time in sullenly watching.

Yet the Mexicans had said or done nothing to justify the suspicion that they would descend to murder and robbery to secure the gold. They did nothing but watch, watch, watch, day after day, as the store of gold increased. But, as the days went by and the pile of gold grew, a new look came into their faces, another light into their eyes. The lips were drawn a little tighter, the forehead was less open. There were no longer laughing efforts made to tell jokes, half in Spanish, half in English, to amuse one another. The old *camaraderie* was gone. Yet, less than a month before, these men had found pleasure in sharing their scanty stores with one another. Now they merely watched each other, and the pile of gold, with a hatred so intense as to be unspeakable.

The pile of gold, though, continued to grow. But at last it ceased. In the crevices, and cracks, and sand, there was no longer a single glitter of yellow. Only the scars remained, where the knifes had cut and gouged out the riches of the rock.

The Mexicans smiled with pleasure as they saw the Americans vainly endeavouring to find more of the metal, and in return the latter grew hot with anger, though, in their hearts, they felt relieved to know that they had exhausted the lead. Already they had as much as they could care for. Had there been more to mine, though, they would have taken it out rather than see anyone else possess it. It had grown to be a pleasure to have it, if only to know that it was theirs, even if they could not use it.

When the pocket was mined out, the Mexicans no longer came up daily to watch the Americans. Instead, they stayed in their camp at the foot of the mountain. They did no work. Why should they? What would the few ounces they could take from their claims amount to, compared with what the Americans had obtained?

Now that there was no longer any gold to mine, the Americans began to devise means to remove the gold they had to where they could dispose of it.

"We can't carry all of it, but we might take part and hide the rest until we could return for it," suggested one.

"Yes, and what we would leave behind the Mexicans would get before we were out of sight. Why don't they get up and go? This is a white man's country," said another.

"No, we can't do that," said Jack. "We will have to send to Wickenburg for a pack-train, and two of you will have to go for it. You can leave to-night, and the three of us who stay will guard the gold. Now, who will go is the question?"

No one answered. Instead, each looked at the other, as if wishing his neighbour would volunteer.

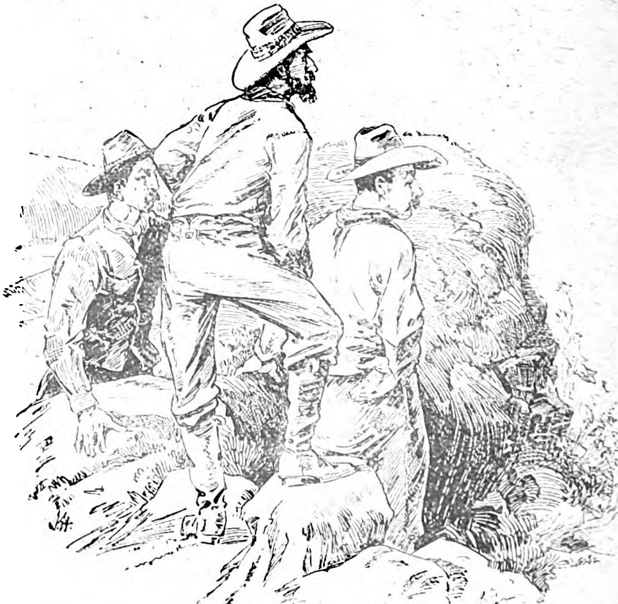
"There's no danger. What's the matter with you? Are you afraid to trust each other with the gold?" asked Jack.

No one replied, yet each knew that he did not want to go and leave the gold behind him. They were beginning to distrust each other as they distrusted the Mexicans.

"Well, we will draw lots, and the two who get stuck will have to go," said Jack.

The lots were drawn, and the two men to whom it had fallen to make the journey returned to camp and tried to sleep until night came. When it was so dark that they could not be seen, they rose, and, slipping out of camp, began their trip across the desert.

The next morning, one of the three men who remained behind, while watching, saw one of the Mexicans take his gun and start round the base of the mountain, as if to hunt. He called the attention of his two comrades to it. As the three watched the Mexican, they saw the latter suddenly stop and look intently at the ground, and then his face turned up in the direction of the

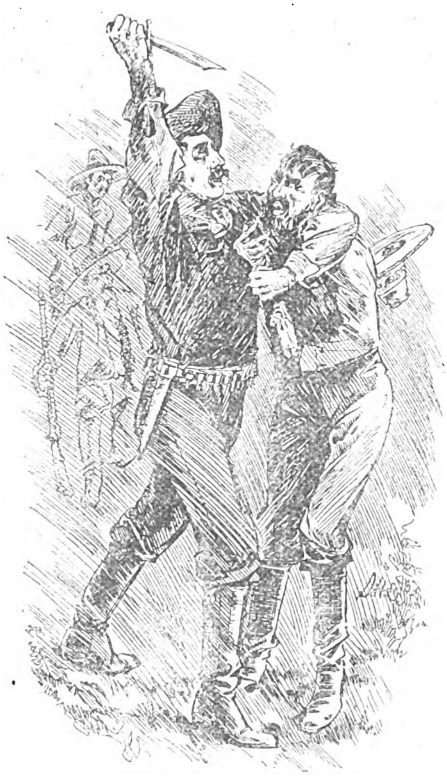


Occasionally they glanced towards the camp where the gold was.

mountain-top, as if to discover whether he was observed. Apparently satisfied that he was not, he began to walk backwards and forwards, as if looking at foot tracks; then, as if satisfied, he turned abruptly and returned to the camp he had just left.

"He has found the boys' trail and knows that they are gone," said Jack.

His two companions merely nodded. They had known, without being told, what Jack was going to say, and what he was thinking of.



For an instant the knife hung in the air.

When the Mexican had returned to his camp, the three men could see him seated with his comrades in conversation. There were five of them, and they appeared to be talking long and earnestly. Occasionally they glanced towards the camp where the gold was, as if trying to see if they were watched. At last one of them rises. Going to a roll of blankets, he picks up a gun, and, returning to the group, begins to clean it. His comrades look at him and laugh, as if at a joke, and then all the rest of them rise and get their arms.

"They are going to try and get the gold," says Jack, "and if we don't do something, they will pick us off one by one, and be on the road to Sonora before the boys get back."

"What can we do?" asks one of his comrades.

"We can go down there and tell them that we know what they are after and they have got to go," replied Jack. "By slipping up under cover of the brush and boulders we can be right among them before they know it, and if we get the drop on them, they will have to do what we say. Get your guns and come on."

The three men rose, and, taking their arms, began the descent of the mountain. Slipping from boulder to boulder and taking advantage of the stunted underbush, it was not long before they were close to the camp. As they paused a moment to take breath, they could hear the Mexicans laughing and joking, as they cleaned their guns, while the hunter, Tomas, whom in the past they had all liked so well, was softly singing to himself in Spanish.

As the men rose, the Mexicans looked up in astonishment. It was the first time the Americans had come among them since the discovery of the gold on the mountain top.

For an instant each side looked at the other in silence, and then Tomas, rising and stepping towards the Americans, asked them in Spanish what they desired.

"We want you to get out of here, for we know what you are cleaning up these guns for," replied Jack.

"To go home with," answered Tomas, adding: "We do not care to mine here any longer."

"You are doing it to murder us and steal our gold, and you have got to leave here at once," said Jack.

"We are going to leave just as we told you. But, when you say we are murderers, you lie!" angrily answered Tomas, partly turning to face his comrades to have them verify his statement.

Almost before the words had left his lips, Jack reached out his left arm, and, throwing it round Tomas' neck, drew him backwards till the Mexican's head lay on his shoulder. As he felt the strangling grasp of the arm, Tomas dropped his gun, and, raising his hands, tried to pull the arm from his throat. His hands had hardly touched the arm when a long-bladed knife rose above his face, grasped so tightly that the hand that held it, with its taut muscles and tense knuckles, looked almost as white as marble.

For an instant the knife hung in the air that the fierce eyes looking down over the upturned face of the Mexican might pick the surest place to drive it into the throat, drawn so tightly backward that one could see the arteries throbbing beneath the skin. But only for an instant, and then, so fast that it seemed like a flash of light, it fell and entered the neck in the muscles just below the left ear. One or two steps, as if blindly striving not to fall even in death, and then down goes what was once Tomas, the hunter.

Both sides are on their feet now, and, as they stand, the Americans cover the Mexicans with their guns.

"You had better go, and go at once, and leave your arms behind," says Jack.

The Mexicans look at him for an instant, and then, with a glance at the body, they turn and start across the desert. The Americans watch them until they are out of sight.

The next day, when the pack train, which had been sent for, has arrived, and has been laden with the gold, it is driven down the trail by the camp where the body lies.

The men pause for an instant to look at the corpse.

"Old Tomas," one of them says, "I always thought him pretty square and rather liked him. Maybe, after all, they really did intend to go home without trying to take the gold, as he said."

"Maybe they did," said Jack; "but we couldn't take chances on any man's honesty with all this gold on our hands."

Richard Sibert.

The Standard Bearer.

Translated from the French of A. Daudet.

THE regiment was fighting on a slope of the railway, and served as a target for the whole Prussian army massed in front of it under cover of the wood. They were shooting at a distance of eighty yards. The officers cried: "Lie down!" but nobody would obey them, and the proud regiment remained standing grouped around their flag.

Towards the vast horizon the sun was sinking, and amid the ripening corn and pasture lands this mass of men, enveloped in a confused smoke, looked like a flock of sheep, surprised, whilst feeding, by the first whirlwind of some awful storm.

It rained bullets on that slope! Nothing could be heard but the crackling of the fusillade, the dull thud of a body in the ditch, and the bullets which rent the air, slowly vibrating, first to one and then to the other side of the field of battle, like the stretched cords of some sinister, resounding machine.

From time to time the colours, which flew above their heads, fluttered in the wind made by the grapeshot, and then sat quietly down in the smoke. At last a voice, stern and proud, arose high above the fusillade, the death-rattles, and the curses of the wounded:

"To the flag, my children; to the flag!"

Soon an officer, vague as a shadow, advanced in this ruddy haze, and the heroic ensign, reanimated, hovered once more before the battle.

Twenty-three times did it fall; twenty-three times was its still warm staff, slipping from a dying hand, seized and once more held aloft; and hardly had the sun sunk down to rest, when the rest of the regiment—scarcely a handful of men—retreated step by step, with the colours, a mere mass of tatters, in the hands of Sergeant Hornus, the twenty-fourth standard-bearer of the day.

Sergeant Hornus was an old fellow who scarcely knew how to sign his own name, and had been twenty years gaining his three stripes. In him were all the miseries of a child, and the brutality of the barracks showed itself on his narrow animal-like forehead, his back bent by the sack; his gait was that of an old veteran; moreover, he was somewhat gruff. But to be a flag-bearer one has no need of eloquence.

On the very evening after the battle the colonel said to him: "You have the colours, my brave man; well, look after them!" And on his poor military cloak, already perforated with rain and bullets, the *cantinière* hastily sewed the golden-braided border of a second lieutenant.

This was this humble being's only piece of arrogance. The old trooper's carriage grew better. The poor creature had been wont to slouch along, his eyes on the ground; he now drew himself proudly up, his look always fixed above, to see this ragged mass wave in the breeze, and his hand held straight in front of him, quite high, above all death, treason, and retreat.

Never was there happier man than Hornus, when the battle was at its hottest, as he held his staff in both hands, well-fixed in its leather socket. He neither spoke nor moved. Serious as a priest, one would have thought he held some sacred emblem. His whole life, his whole force, seemed to be in those fingers clasped around the gilded shreds through which the bullets ploughed their way; and his eyes, full of defiance, looked straight at the Prussians, as if to say: "Try, then, to come and take it from me!"

Nobody tried to, no, not even death.

After Bonny, after Gravelotte, the bloodiest of all battles, the flag went everywhere, hewn to bits, perforated and transparent with holes. But it was always old Hornus who carried it.

At last September arrived, and the army was blockaded at Metz, where, during that long halt, the cannons rusted in the mud; where the finest troops of the world, demoralised by the inactivity, the want of work, and the news of repeated disasters, died of fever and worry at the foot of their piled arms. Neither officers nor soldiers sustained the least hope. Hornus, alone, still had confidence. The love of his tricolour held him far from all; the more he thought of it, the more did it seem to him that nothing was lost.

Unhappily, as they were not fighting any more, the colonel held the standards at his quarters in a suburb of Metz; and the brave Hornus was like a mother deprived of her child. He thought of it incessantly. Then, when the *ennui* was too much for him, he went to Metz, and having seen his favourite in the same place, leaning against the wall, he returned, filled with courage and patience, bringing back to his damp tent dreams of battles and marches, with the three colours, unfolded to the wind, floating over the Prussian entrenchments.

One of Marshal Bazaine's "Orders of the day" dispelled all these illusions. One morning, when Hornus awakened, he saw that the camp was in a state of excitement, the soldiers stood in animated groups, gesticulating, shouting with rage, and shaking their fists towards the town, as if their anger pointed to a guilty one.

Someone cried: "Let us seize him! Shoot him!"

And the officers let them say it. They marched apart, their heads bent, as if they were ashamed before their men. In truth it *was* shameful. They had just read to 150,000 soldiers, well armed, and still in health, the Marshal's order which delivered them to the enemy without fighting.

"And the flags?" asked Hornus, turning pale.

"The colours were sold with the rest, with the guns, the remainder of the baggage, all ——"

"Goo—goo—good God!" faltered the poor man. "They surely haven't mine." And he rushed off towards the town.

The city was also in a state of great animation. National guards, townsmen, and city volunteers, all crying and rushing about. Deputations were passing, angrily representing themselves to the Marshal. Hornus: he saw nothing, heard nothing. He talked to himself as he ran up the Rue de Faubourg.

"Steal my flag! Nonsense! Is it possible? Have they the right? Let him give the Prussians his own things, his gilded coaches, and his beautiful plate from Mexico! But that, that's mine. . . . . It's my honour. . . . . I forbid anyone to touch it."

All these phrases were broken by his gruffness and want of breath; but at the bottom of it all, the old man had his own idea! A good idea, well agreed upon by himself. To take the Standard, carry it into the middle of the regiment, and hew his way through the Prussians with all those who wished to follow him.

When he arrived there they would not even let him enter. The colonel, who was also furious, would see no one, but Hornus did not listen to this.

He swore, shrieked, and at last threw the orderly on one side.

"My flag. I want my flag."

At last a window opened.

"Is it you, Hornus?"

"Yes, colonel, I want——"

"All the colours are at the Arsenal. You have only to go there, they will give you a receipt."

"A receipt? What for?"

"It's the Marshal's order."

"But, colonel——"

"Be quiet!" and the window was shut.

Old Hornus staggered like a man intoxicated.

"A receipt! A receipt!" repeated he mechanically, then he slowly commenced to walk, recollecting only one thing, that was that the Flag was in the Arsenal, and that he must regain it at all costs.

The Arsenal gates had been flung wide open to allow the Prussian waggons, which were waiting, one behind the other, in the court, to pass.

In one corner were heaped all the Flags of Bazaine's army, thrown together on the muddy paving-stones. Nothing could be more sad than to see those honoured tatters of silk, that *débris* of golden fringes and splintered staves, all that glorious paraphernalia thrown on the ground, soiled by the rain and dirt. An officer of the administration took them one by one, and on calling out the name of the regiment, each ensign advanced to take a receipt. Swiftly, impassively, two Prussian officers superintended the loading.

"'Tis not possible that you should depart like this, dragging your shreds, sweeping sadly the ground, like birds that have broken their wings! You are going to disgrace the beautiful things which have never been sullied, and each one of you takes away a piece of France. The sun of many a long march lies between your folds. In the marks of the bullets you hold a *souvenir* of deaths unknown, fallen, perchance, by an unaimed bullet."

"Hornus, it is yours—they are calling you—go and get your receipt."

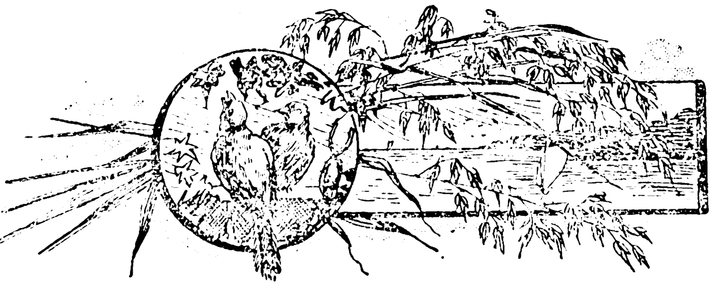
What did he care for the receipt!

The flag was there before him. Yes, it was his, the most beautiful, the most mutilated of all. And, on seeing it again, he thought himself once more upon the slope. He heard the bullets singing, the rattle of the grapeshot, and the voice of the colonel: "To the flag, my children; to the flag!" Then his twenty-three comrades on the ground, and he, the twenty-fourth, throwing himself forward to relift and support the poor flag, which tottered for want of arms to support it. Ah! On that day he swore to defend it, to guard it to the death; and now——

To think of it, all the blood in his heart mounted to his head.

Distracted, aghast, he rushed at the Prussian officer and snatched the beloved ensign from his hands. Then he tried to raise it again high in the air, crying: "To the fla——"

But his voice caught in his throat. He felt the staff tremble, slip between his hands. In that wearying air, that air which weighs so heavily on evacuated towns, the standards could float no more—nothing with pride could exist. And old Hornus fell—dead.



LORD PUREFOY'S ENGAGEMENT

From his earliest childhood Lord Purefoy had the benefit of every good example and precept which money could procure. His mother, left a widow with her only child, could not bring herself to expose him to the temptations of a public school, but had him grounded in Latin by a governess whose high moral character and educational powers were attested by three duchesses, and intrusted him subsequently to the care of a gentleman who, as a fellow of Baliol and chaplain to a bishop, had earned and deserved a reputation for all desirable knowledge and virtue.

Immediately before Lord Purefoy reached the age at which he became qualified to sit and legislate among his peers, two resident tutors, and three who visited the house daily, were engaged in putting on the final touches. With these educational advantages, it is no matter for wonder that he was looked upon by all those who came in contact with him as an altogether model representative of the Upper House.

Lord Purefoy came of age at the country seat of his family, where he owns seven parishes, and returned immediately to London with his mother. He was, and is, a charming and virtuous young man.

For twenty-one years he never gave his mother a moment's real uneasiness; but on the day three weeks after he had attained his majority, he walked into her boudoir, and, without wasting time over any preliminary explanations, announced that he was engaged to be married.

The Dowager Lady Purefoy was seated in her favourite rocking chair, and the start of horror which she gave, almost sent her backwards out of it. As it was, being a young woman for her age, she extended her feet, gripped the arms, and, by a strong effort, maintained her equilibrium. The danger, and her escape from it, steadied her nerves.

"Married, my dear boy!" she cried. "What do you mean? Who is she? Where did you meet her?"

Lord Purefoy answered the last question first.

"I met her, mother," he said, slowly and quietly, as if his mind dwelt with pleasure on the incident, "in St. James's Park."

"Who introduced you?"

"No one."

Lord Purefoy had been admirably educated, but he had never been checked. Before ten minutes were over there had been a "row royal" between mother and son; and she learnt that the family temper, till then dormant, had undoubtedly been inherited by her gentle-mannered son, and also that the future Countess of Purefoy was a barmaid at a Regent Street restaurant, who had asked him the time as he walked home after listening to a debate from the Peers' Gallery in the House of Commons.

In three days Lord Purefoy had gone into chambers in Piccadilly, owing to his mother's refusal to receive his *fiancée*, and the date fixed for the marriage was in every "society" paper. Congratulations and the reverse poured in upon him; but, having gathered the general drift of his relatives' correspondence from the first two or three epistles which he received from them, Lord Purefoy took to burning their letters unread. He was lighting a cigarette with one, at the head of which he had seen the crest of a distant cousin, when a word or two which he could not help seeing caused him to pause and unroll it carefully.

> Dear Purefoy,—So delighted to hear of your approaching wedding, and of your intention to marry for love a woman whom you have chosen for yourself, and who, no doubt, is in every way worthy of you. Come down and stay with us for a week, and bring her with you. We go to the Limes to-morrow, so come soon.
>
> Your affectionate cousin,
>
> Kitty Golightly.

Now, Lord Purefoy had not seen Lady Golightly since he was sixteen, and had heard such stories whispered at the family councils of the doings at her ladyship's riverside residence as had made his hair curl with horror. If he had seen her on the day before he received her invitation, leaving his mother's house after a visit of an hour's duration, he would not have recognised her, or would hardly have believed that she had been received there.

Nevertheless, he answered her note in the affirmative, and went; and he took Persephone Giles with him, picturing to himself as they whizzed out of Paddington, the reception which he would give the Golightlys some day in return for their early recognition of his beloved one.

"Are they rich, dear?" said Miss Giles.

"Always in debt," he answered; "nobody's enemies but their own, I believe, but foolishly improvident at all times."

"Like as not they are after your money, dear boy," she said.

"A Purefoy never imputes motives," he answered; adding, as she still looked dissatisfied, "you shall help your relatives and I will assist mine." And he accomplished the rest of the journey with her head upon his shoulder, while she in turn pictured herself setting up every uncle and cousin who had been kind to her in palatial public-houses, and sprinkling with the dust of her haughty chariot-wheels those who had thwarted her in childhood or prophesied evil results when she adopted the bar as a profession, and exposed herself to the temptations of the metropolis.

Arrived at the Limes, they found that every one had gone upstairs to dress for dinner except Lady Golightly, who received them in the hall, and took Persephone upstairs at once to show her her room. Lord Purefoy walked behind them, bearing what his *fiancée* called her "reticule"; it was in crimson plush, and would, no doubt, have looked charming with a coronet upon it.

Two of the footmen had been carrying up the luggage, and were coming out of the room.

"Bill!" cried Persephone, as one of the men passed her. The man turned; he was a good-looking young fellow, with well-oiled hair and a sickly smile. He knew Persephone, that was evident; but he did not seem to be quite prepared for what followed. She is a warm-hearted girl, and before Lord Purefoy quite realised that a mutual recognition had taken place, his betrothed had kissed Sir Harry Golightly's valet under his mistress's nose.

Lady Golightly had so complete a command over her features, that she says she never changed colour nor smiled; she always says the scene was unplanned and unrehearsed, which may be true.

"Of course, I knew his name was Giles," she told the ladies when she got downstairs, "but I could not guess all Giles were first cousins."

"And Lord Purefoy?" said some one.

"Oh, he has told her never to be ashamed of her relations, and quoted Lady Clara Vere de Vere, and King Cophetua, and the Bible, and all sorts of things, I know; but he did look rather uncomfortable. The person I felt sorry for was the man; he looked as if he wished the stair-carpets would open and swallow him safely down into the servants' hall."

Then some of the men came into the room, and her ladyship was silent.

Lord Purefoy and Miss Giles came down last, and were duly introduced. The other people evidently knew one another and their hostess well; they showed great pleasure at being introduced to Persephone, and some surprise when she shook hands with them all round.

It was a ceremony which Lord Purefoy would have cut short if he could have caught her eye. Catching a person's eye is difficult, even when you sit opposite to her at dinner; and Lord Purefoy, on one or two occasions, tried it in vain, much regretting that Lady Golightly should have separated him from the object of his affections.

Champagne always flows at the Limes, and Persephone evidently liked the brand supplied. She apparently also liked the conversation of Captain Masham, who sat next to her. At all events, her laughter was "frequent and painful to Lord Purefoy, and free." He felt for what he correctly imagined to be her foot under the table, and he pressed it warningly.

"Some one's squeezing my foot under the table," she said to Captain Masham, in her outspoken, innocent way. She did not know how loudly she was talking, nor reckon on a sudden pause in the conversation, which made her remark audible to everyone at the table; but she did not mind, especially as no one laughed and no one seemed surprised; indeed, it was curious how much everyone seemed to take Persephone as a matter of course.

The ladies certainly did not speak to her, but the men addressed her across the table, and she answered them freely, all except Lord Purefoy, who grew graver and more silent as the meal proceeded. She was a very handsome girl, and she looked very pretty as she grew animated, though the hand with which she was inclined to gesticulate was not as white as Lady Golightly's. Lord Purefoy had paid a good price for her dress; it struck him at dinner that there was not quite so much of it as his hostess and her fair guests seemed to think requisite. Perhaps their necks and arms were not equal to those of Persephone.

"She is a charming girl," said Lady Golightly to him in the drawing-room after dinner; "so natural!"

"Yes, yes, of course; she is quite a child of nature," he suggested uneasily.

"She has been telling us stories of her past life," said Lady Golightly. "I wonder if you know them all?"

Lord Purefoy blushed furiously. In spite of his strict education, he had understood one of Persephone's anecdotes sufficiently to have warned her then and there not to repeat such things to anyone.

"Where is she?" he inquired.

"In the conservatory with Captain Masham. She seems to have quite captivated him; you had better be careful, though."

"Is he the Captain Masham who——"

"Oh, Purefoy! did the Bishop's chaplain let you read the divorce reports? Poor Charlie! He figured rather badly in that case, I know."

"I wish you would show me the way to the conservatory, Cousin Kate," said Lord Purefoy.

Now Persephone was sitting in a very dark corner, and Persephone, according to her lights, was doing nothing wrong. Perhaps she was chilly; perhaps she did not know it was Captain Masham's arm, and not the back of a wicker chair, against which she was leaning. She certainly did not know that, the week before, a young man who was reckoned to be on the point of proposing to a niece of Lady Golightly's, was tracked into the conservatory, and the clear, cold, useful brilliancy of the electric light suddenly turned on with a snap, just as he was following her upon his knees round the little marble fountain.

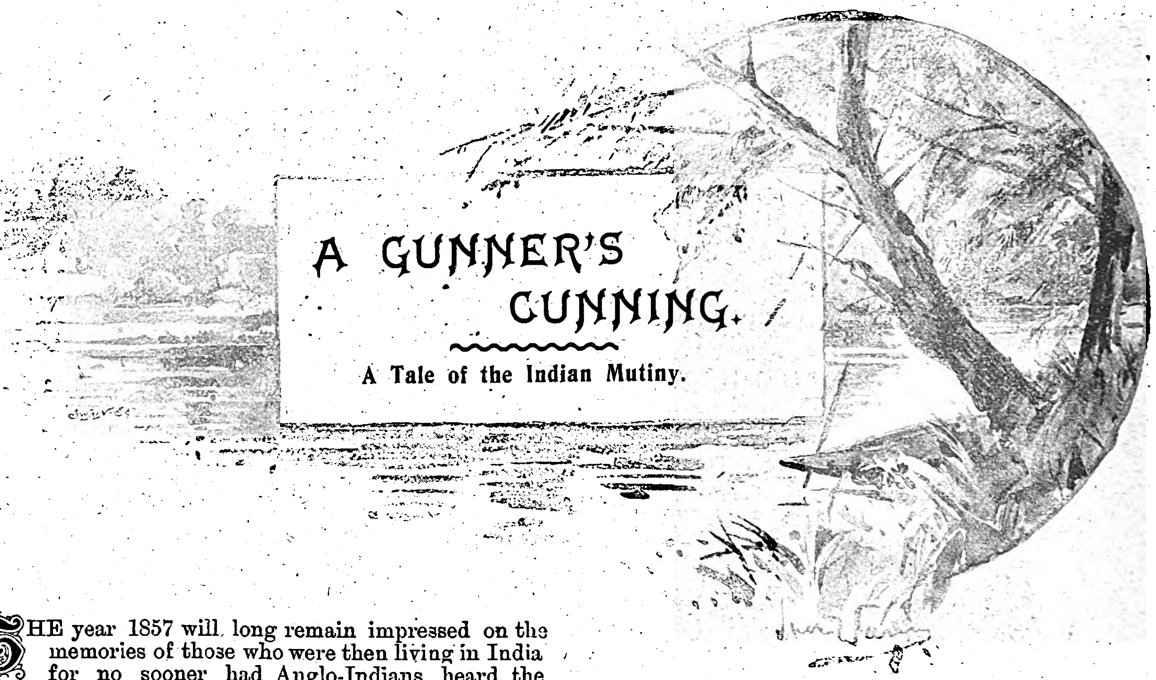
The joke was in the worst possible taste; and the roar of laughter which the situation caused broke off for the time, at least, a fairly promising love affair, and caused a grand quarrel in the smoking-room afterwards.

It was only for a second that Lady Golightly turned on the electric light, twisting the little ivory button first to the right and then to the left.

"She is quite a child of nature, Purefoy," she whispered in her softest tones, as she drew him back into the drawing-room; "and so is Captain Masham; perhaps he, too, is her cousin."

The family solicitor thought Miss Giles must really be a very nice girl to accept so small a sum as £5,000, and wondered why Lady Purefoy, who paid it, should say that the whole affair had cost her £7,500. Perhaps Lady Golightly could explain.

P. L.



A GUNNER'S CUNNING.

A Tale of the Indian Mutiny.

THE year 1857 will long remain impressed on the memories of those who were then living in India for no sooner had Anglo-Indians heard the welcome news that the war with Russia was over, than their attention was called to the state of affairs in their vicinity by sinister reports of mutiny among the Sepoy troops, many of whom were well-known in all the garrisons of the Empire.

Early in that year I was stationed with my battery of field artillery in the town of Brahmapore, with a small force of troops, to guard a rather important arsenal well-stocked with arms and ammunition, when news was brought of the disbanding of the 19th and 34th Sepoy regiments at Barrackpore.

The majority thought that this was the end of the disturbances, but older heads shook and urged caution, though at first their opinions were laughed at.

All Europeans who were living in the neighbourhood took up their residence in the cantonments; provisions were brought in, and every preparation was made in case of need. Whilst we were in this state of suspense I was one morning about to enjoy my usual bath when I heard my orderly, Denis, inquiring for me, and in a few minutes his head appeared at the edge of the curtains which shut off my bath-room, and in his broad brogue, which always came to the front when he was excited, he called:

"Are you there, sur?"

I felt at once that he had something important to communicate, for his haste and brogue were not at all usual, so I answered:

"Yes, come in."

He did so, and pulled the curtains behind him; but before unburdening his mind, peeped out cautiously once more to make sure no eavesdroppers were near, and then, coming close up to my ear, he whispered:

"Thim devils are comin', sur."

I need hardly say I was out of my bath in a moment, for I believed that the mutineers were at hand, as I felt sure that "thim devils" could mean no other than the rebellious Sepoys.

Denis, however, quickly quieted me by saying that his knowledge only came from a conversation which he had overheard amongst some of the native servants, one of whom, Bag Singh, had been to the bazaar to purchase provisions, and had come back as Denis described him, "sthruting like a peacock," so full of importance was he at being the bearer of the news that the hated Feringees were to be driven away or killed.

At first I felt inclined to think that this was simply another of the wild rumours which were flying about so freely, and laughed at Denis' alarm, and reminded him that informers were not liked where he came from, but he was most earnest in his assertion, and he reminded me that it was not informing when the "haythens were in it."

Having learned from Denis that he had come straight to me on overhearing this conversation, and extracted an assurance that he had not breathed a word to anyone but myself on the subject, I left him to busy himself with my uniform, and ordering him not to speak of the matter to a living soul, I went to the Colonel's quarters, and, finding him enjoying his morning cigar, I told him in a few words all I knew.

He looked serious and thoughtful for a few minutes, and then relighting his cigar, which had gone out during my chat, he said quietly: "Well, forewarned is forearmed, we must give them a warm welcome; go back to your quarters, and find out as much as possible, report to me at once, but don't go beyond the lines without orders." I turned to go, and as I did so the Colonel called to his orderly, and I knew that he would soon have everything ready for the expected attack.

When I re-entered my quarters, I found Denis, while ostensibly brushing my tunic, keeping one eye fixed on the verandah; I turned my eyes in that direction, and saw a bottle of my best brandy apparently hidden under a shrub, but in such a way as to be plainly visible from the native quarters. I looked at Denis for an explanation, but he put his finger to his lips as a signal not to say anything, and coming up close to me with the tunic in his hand, a merry twinkle lit up his grey eyes, as he whispered: "I put it there for Bag Singh to steal; that will oil his tongue, and then we'll get the whole truth out of him; there's nothing like a dhrop of the craythur to make a man talk," he added.

He had scarcely finished speaking, when a shadow crossed our path; I looked up; it was Bag Singh, and as he disappeared, so did the bottle. How he took it I never knew, but it was gone.

Denis gave a broad grin and said: "I'll know where to find him directly."

A few moments later Denis also sauntered off in the direction of the stables, while I lit a cigar, and tried to quiet my nerves as well as I could, knowing full well that Denis would get all the possible information easier than I could, for none of the servants knew of his attainments in Hindustanee, and so would not hesitate to talk in his presence, whilst they would suspect me and remain dumb.

One hour went past and then another, and I began to fear that Denis had only wasted a bottle of brandy for no good, when I heard his voice commanding some one to "come along, ye blackguards, I'll show the master the state yer in," and then he appeared, dragging poor Bag Singh and one of the stable boys along, both of them in a state of intoxication.

My first glimpse of the wretched culprits would have made me burst out laughing, had I not caught the very serious look on Denis's face, and I knew at once that he had something important to communicate; so assuming my most determined look, in spite of their most piteous howls for mercy, I ordered Denis to march them off to the guard-room and to keep them there until they were sober.

In a few moments Denis returned, and as he informed me that he had the whole plot, I took him at once to the Colonel's quarters, and there we gained the complete story from him, which was, briefly, that when he left my quarters after the theft of the brandy he had gone down to the stables, where, as he suspected, he found Bag Singh and his boon companion busily engaged in disposing of the brandy under the shelter of some shrubs which grew near one of the small windows, from which Denis was enabled to overhear their conversation.

This conversation, stripped of Denis' "sez I," and "sez he," and "sez I to meself," amounted to this: Bag Singh, having gone down to the bazaar in the early morning, had met an ancient Fakir, who had told him that next morning, about one o'clock, a large body of the mutineers who were then on their way would arrive by the Delhi road, and would fall upon the small British encampment and kill the hated Feringees and take away their guns, which they badly needed. To Bag Singh was intrusted the work of warning the Sepoys stationed at Brahmapore to be ready to join their comrades when they arrived, as the Fakir feared that his presence in the encampment would be viewed with suspicion, and might cause alarm.

Poor Bag Singh, like many another man, had chosen to fortify himself for his task with the brandy which he had discovered so opportunely, and which, as it generally does, proved anything but a friend to its too ardent worshipper.

Having given a few orders to the adjutant, the Colonel told me to have his horse saddled as well as mine, and another for Denis, whom he thought it might be as well to keep out of the men's way, lest he might be tempted to fall into the same trap that he had laid for Bag Singh, and a few minutes later we three were quietly trotting along the Delhi road, which, for some distance, ran between level fields until it came to a stream over which a bridge was thrown, and then it was a gradual rise for about a mile through a wood, which increased in thickness as we reached the crest of the hill, where it was quite a dense mass. From this ridge the road dipped down in a straight line for about a quarter of a mile, where it branched off in two or three directions.

As we reached the crest, we reined in our horses, and the Colonel quietly surveyed the ground for some minutes, and then, turning to me, said: "You will post two of the guns there (pointing to his right). Markham will be there to the left, and Jason will be here with me in the centre; but, mind you, neither show a light nor fire until our guns here begin, and then blaze away until you get the word to cease fire."

So saying he wheeled round, and in a moment we were trotting back to Brahmapore. As we reached the cantonments the adjutant came forward, and saluting the Colonel, informed him that all his orders had been carried out, though the men grumbled when they heard that they were to parade at sundown. At this the Colonel grinned as he answered: "The beggars will enjoy it when they know what it is for."

There was nothing more to do until sunset, so all those who could strolled off to the mess to get what tiffin they could before starting on what might prove the last parade for many of them.

Scarcely had the guard, which turned out to salute the setting sun, been dismissed than the bugles rang out the assembly, and as the men fell into their places, whilst the horses were harnessed, the natives crowded round to see the parade, as they had done dozens of times, and within half an hour the little party on whom so much depended swept out of the gate, which promptly closed upon them and shut in the crowds who would have followed them.

We marched slowly along the road over which I had ridden in the morning. As we neared the crest of the hill "Halt" was quietly passed along the line, and in a few minutes I was ordered to take two guns to the right and push on until I had a good view of the road below, whilst at the same time I saw Markham wheel his two guns to the left. As we reached a point from which we could see the whole valley below, the guns were unlimbered and loaded, whilst I placed the limbers in a position to be sheltered, but at the same time be near to keep up a steady supply of ammunition.

Just as I had finished this to my satisfaction the Colonel came up and inspected the position, running his eyes critically along the sights at the broad white road below, which was destined before many hours to be the death-bed of many a brave fellow, who now, perhaps, was chuckling to himself of an easy victory, and dreaming of a country once more free from the presence of the hated Feringees.

Bidding me order the men to keep in cover, and once more warning me not to fire until the guns in the centre should begin, the Colonel retired. It was then nearly midnight, and the cold, damp night air made more than one shiver as they stood silently listening for a sound. How long the time seemed, and what thoughts surged through men's minds during the dreary watch, which seemed as though it would never end, no pen can tell. One o'clock passed, and the moon, sinking low, threatened soon to leave us in total darkness. Men have gained the Victoria Cross for acts of bravery done in the heat and excitement of battle, and right well do they deserve it; but to keep up your courage through a long watch with every nerve strained to its utmost, and feeling powerless to help yourself, not knowing what moment you may be attacked, surely is a more severe task.

These thoughts, among others of boyhood's days, and of those behind us whose very lives depended upon that handful standing silently there, ran through my mind. I had begun to lose thought of why we were there, when I felt my arm touched, and, looking round, found Denis by my side, quietly pointing to a spot in the road, which showed darker in the moonlight.

As we gazed on it, I saw an occasional glint as the moon's rays struck a sword or a bayonet. I quietly moved from one gun to another as I became certain of this, and found the gunners all intent in watching what was evidently an advancing mass of human beings. Just before they reached the foot of the hill they halted, and apparently closed up so as not to leave laggards behind, and by so doing they unconsciously aided in their own destruction when the guns once opened fire.

Their halt was not for long, however, and presently the rumble of their heavy baggage waggons could be heard, mingled with the steady tramp, tramp, which told of trained men marching. On they came, now less than half a mile, now not more than a quarter; could it be possible that those in the centre did not see them! Still on they came; they could not be more than 300 yards off now, when there was a bang, followed by the scream of a shell, which had not burst before it was followed by a second roar, and then all six guns rang together, whilst above the shrieks of the grape shot arose human shrieks and yells, mingled with the screams of terrified animals as they plunged and reared in their wild endeavours to break loose and escape the torrent of missiles which tore through the whole body.

A few bullets flew above our heads when men and horses rushed pell mell down the hill which a few minutes before they had proudly breasted. As long as any mass was seen together the guns roared, but the terrified wretches were soon so scattered as to give no chance of hitting them, and then the bugle rang out the "Cease fire" whilst men asked each other if they were all right, yet each stood to his post for fear the enemy might re-form.

Scarcely had the smoke cleared off, than the sun, at whose coming the moon had paled, sprang up, touching first the tops of the mountains beyond, then, leaping to the tops of trees, it gradually crept down their trunks and spread across the whole earth.

Of those who but a short time before had marched up that little hill, none but dead and wounded remained. We sent down parties to seek for the wounded, and the few they found told too plainly of the effect of our fire at that short range.

As the wounded were discovered they were attended to, and being joined soon after by a party who marched out at daybreak, we buried the dead bodies which strewed the now ploughed-up road, and once more turned our faces homewards, thankful for an easy victory, yet looking forward to harder work in the near future.

Nor were we disappointed, for before many days were over we were relieved and ordered to the front, where, as long as the mutiny lasted, we were constantly engaged, so that when we returned to England there were very few of those who, thanks to the cunning of Gunner Denis, aided by a bottle of brandy, took part in the saving of Brahmapore. C. F.

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Miss Julia Neilson, Miss Bateman, Miss Esmé Beringer, Mrs. Langtry, Miss Laura Johnston, Miss Alma Steele, Miss Maggie Ripley, Miss Fortescue, Mr. Rutland Barrington, Miss Nina Cadiz, Mr. George Thorne, Miss Corke, Miss Kate Cutler, Miss Nora Williamson, Miss Grantley, and Miss Agatha Rose.

The Secret Closet.

IT was a winter's night of piercing coldness in Amsterdam. Banker Brounker sat near his stove smoking a long pipe; opposite was his intimate friend, Von Grote. Madame Brounker and her children were at a party, so the two friends, sure of not being interrupted, conversed confidentially.

"What can be the reason," said Grote to Brounker, "that you will not consent to the marriage of your son with the daughter of Birkenrode?"

"My dear fellow, I do not oppose the match. It is my wife who will not hear of it."

"But what reason can she have to refuse her consent?"

"I cannot tell you," answered Brounker, lowering his voice.

"A mystery!" exclaimed Grote. "Come, you know how discreet I am, let me know about it."

"But will you promise to keep it a secret?"

"I promise faithfully."

"Well, it is now six-and-twenty years since I was married, and I frankly confess to you that I was excessively jealous of my wife.

"My position obliged me to see a great deal of company at home, and I feared that some of my numerous visitors would rob me of my Clotilda's affections; one of these particularly, Colonel Birkenrode, caused me the greatest fear.

"I could not deny him access to my house as he belonged to a very powerful family, neither had anything in his conduct given me reason to do so.

"At the time I speak of I bought this house, where I previously had constructed in secret, behind this stove, a narrow closet, from which I could hear all that passed in this room, wherein my wife received her visitors.

"For a long time Birkenrode contented himself with depicting in the most vivid colours the passions which consumed him; my wife listened without making any answer. At last, one day, he became more impatient than before, and threatened to blow his brains out before her eyes if she would not show a little more pity.

"'But I am not at liberty,' exclaimed she, in a voice interrupted by sobs.

"'And if your liberty were restored to you?' urged the Lothrio.

"'Sir!' said my wife.

"'If you become a widow,' insisted he, 'swear to give me your hand.'

"To this proposition my wife answered only with her tears, and he left her.

"The next morning an extraordinary occurrence greatly increased the agitation of Clotilda. During breakfast a servant came and whispered in my ear that the cook wished to speak to me privately. 'Let him come in,' said I; 'I have no secrets from my wife.'

"The cook came, as pale as death, and with a long face he told me that he had that morning received a packet containing 300 florins, a small phial, and a note telling him to put the contents of the phial into the first eel pasty he made. (You well know my extreme fondness for eels, while my wife cannot bear even the smell of them.)

"He was promised even a greater recompense if he faithfully executed the commission. Fearing some treachery, he had hastened to give me the phial and the 300 florins.

"I immediately put a few drops of the liquid contained in the phial on a lump of sugar and gave it to my wife's little dog. The poor little animal was taken with violent convulsions and expired in a few moments. There was no doubt that the intention was to destroy me.

"That same day Birkenrode came as usual, but Clotilda refused to see him, and wrote to say that she would confess all to her husband if ever he dared to show himself again. Having uselessly tried to calm her anger, he resolved at last to marry; and since that our families have had no communication except that my son has fallen in love with his daughter, and although I have given my consent, my wife opposes it."

"She is right," indignantly exclaimed Von Grote. "I never should have thought Birkenrode capable of such a vile action."

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Brounker, bursting with laughter. "Do you, then, too, accuse him?"

"Who, then, could it be, if he was not the culprit?"

"It was myself, dear fellow; the adventure cost me 300 florins, which I gave to my cook. It was rather dear, but at the same time I got rid of a dangerous rival and a lap dog which I equally detested—ha, ha, ha!"

At this moment the door opened and Madame Brounker entered the room.

"I thought you were at the party, Clotilda," said her husband.

"No; I do not feel very well, and am going to bed. Maurice has accompanied his sister. I have brought you a key, which I have found on your desk; and as it does not seem to belong to any of the locks in this house, some friend of yours must have left it behind him."

Brounker, deeply blushing, took the key. He had recognised it as the key to his private closet.

"My dear," said Clotilda, "I have given Maurice my consent to his marriage with the daughter of Mr. Birkenrode."

"Thanks, dear wife," said Brounker.

"That is good news."

"Mr. Grote," said she, "pray remain and sup with my husband to-night. We have an excellent eel pasty in the larder, which, I assure you, does not contain the slightest portion of poison!"

At these words she retired. Hardly was the door closed, when Von Grote said to Brounker: "You are properly caught in your own net. She has been in your secret closet. He that digs a pit for his enemy often falls into it himself."

E. C. WAGGENER.

THE MAN IN A HUNDRED.

"NOW see here, my friend," said John Proctor, his honest eyes looking gravely into the tramp's face, as he balanced a sixpence on the tip of his finger. "I'm not going to read you a homily on the subject of labour, but I want to present to you a little matter of statistics. You know, as well as I, that the country is swarming with men of your class. Not fewer than six, begging for money, have stopped me in the street to-day, while down there at the yard"—indicating with his hand a pile of timber surrounding a building in the distance—"we haven't had three applications for work in a month."

"Try me."

"Do you imagine you would work if you had the chance? I have had a little experience with fellows of your sort. You have such remarkable appetites." He addressed him generally as the representative of a race. "You work half-an-hour, then come with the plea that you can't work on an empty stomach, draw an advance of half-a-crown on your wages, and that is the last we ever see of you.

"Come down to the yard this afternoon, however, and I'll give you a job. But take this half-crown and get filled up first."

He had changed the sixpence for a larger coin and held it in his outstretched hand.

The man did not immediately extend his hand to take it. In the moment or two that elapsed the young fellow thought he detected a trace of something allied to resentful pride as a grimy hand closed greedily upon the silver, and the fellow disappeared without even troubling himself to make any formal expression of his gratitude.

As John Proctor took his way down through the park in the direction of his office, he seemed to throw off the unpleasant reflections which had been annoying him with one shrug of his powerful shoulders. The young man's eyes fell cheerily upon the somewhat incongruous array of buildings that constituted the town. He gloried in the homely little edifices, squatting over the ground in various directions.

Had not every foot of timber been supplied from his own yard? And did not this avalanche of trade mean—Annie? Nothing could be mean or poor which brought these years of waiting to an end. He was a practical man, little given to enthusiasm of any sort, but for her sake he looked with glowing vision upon the turreted mountain tops in the distance, with their purple shadows and golden light.

The thought lent cheerful energy to his voice as he entered the yard and gave some directions to Martin, his hard-worked bookkeeper and general factotum. Proctor was deeply engrossed in making out an order for several cartloads of timber, when a shadow darkened the door, and the tramp stood before him. He could not repress an exclamation of surprise. The vagabond observed it, and his face lowered as he asserted himself defiantly.

"Yes, I've come," he said. "What are you going to give me to do?"

John Proctor put on his hat and went with him into the yard, where an empty cart was waiting to be filled. He showed the man a small slip of paper tacked on the end, and was about to explain where he would find the material designated, when the fellow threw off his coat and deftly attacked a pile of lathes which happened to be the first item on the list.

"Hullo!" said Proctor, gazing at him in surprise; "you seem to know something about this business."

"A little," returned the man shortly.

The young man made his way back to the office.

At six o'clock, when the hands came up to receive pay for their day's work, John Procter saw his *protégé* standing a little distance away. The man made no demand for wages, and his employer took no notice of him. As the men filed out, a personal friend of Proctor came running in the office with a package in his hand.

"Here, Proctor, run them over quickly and sign the receipt. It's the £1,000 from Juarez and Signor. I haven't a moment to lose."

The young man hastily counted the notes, signed his name to the receipt in a bold, dashing hand, and the agent hurried off.

Left alone, Proctor drew from his pocket a long Russian leather pocket-book, and laid the notes carefully inside. As he thrust this into his breast-pocket he chanced to glance towards the window, and encountered the hungry eyes of the tramp following all his movements from without. As the man saw he was detected, he paused, seemed about to speak, then changed his mind and sauntered away carelessly. A vague anxiety assailed John Proctor. It was long after banking hours; there was no help for it—he must be the custodian of the treasure until morning.

He sat up late that night. It was very late when he rose, and, locking doors and windows, proceeded to the little inner room where he slept. He drew off his coat, and, folding it carefully, placed it beneath his pillow. Then he examined the barrels of a bulldog pistol which hung upon a hook beside the bed. Reassured by this precaution, he sank into a heavy sleep.

Several hours before a man had crawled upon a low pile of planks, flanked by two others of towering height. As he stretched himself at full length, with a bundle of shavings for a pillow, he philosophically reflected that such a bed was not to be despised. He was not ill-qualified to judge, for his experience had been wide and diversified, and he had learned to weigh the most delicate points of variance with the fine discrimination of a connoisseur.

A little later two glowing sparks of fire seemed to glide down the railway lines, steal round the office, and disappear within the long drying shed at its rear. During their progress these sparks of fire occasionally described magnificent curves in the air, in the accentuation of certain rhythmical utterances in the corrupted Spanish of the Mexican tongue.

John Proctor awoke that night to find himself assailed by a foe mightier than his feeble imagination had pictured. He tried to rise, but found himself unable, oppressed by a terrible sense of suffocation from dense volumes of smoke which filled the air, through which vast sheets of flames darted their forked tongues towards him. Suddenly the wall of flame and smoke was parted, and the face of the tramp bent over him. He was roughly shaken, pulled off the bed, half dragged, half carried through the little private office, and dragged into the larger room beyond, where the fire had begun its work of devastation. Then voice and memory came back, and he shouted:

"My notes! In my coat pocket—under the pillow—let me go!"

For answer he was violently propelled forward into the arms of some men, eagerly crowding through the flaming doorway. He fought with them wildly, and finally broke down and cried like a child.

* * * * *

"Martin," said Proctor, abruptly next morning, "did that fellow who got me out last night come out safely himself?"

"Now I think of it," returned Martin, "he went back a minute, but he got out all right—just as the roof fell in. I thought at the moment a piece of falling timber hit him, but he scrambled off fast enough."

A dread suspicion assailed John Proctor's honest heart, but he repelled it sturdily. Yet all day long, as he wandered dreamily about, answering a thousand idle questions, or fishing from the ruins various mementoes of the wreck, there would constantly intrude upon him the memory of two greedy, devouring eyes peering through a window, a strange retreat into a burning building and disappearance into the shadows. When night came it was necessary for some one to stay and guard the ruins, for if the wind should rise, some smouldering piles of timber might be fanned into a blaze and the remainder of the stock swept away. Martin, wearied and hollow-eyed, offered his services.

"Not a bit of it, Martin. Go home to your wife and babies. I have engaged a man."

Proctor did not add that the watchman he had engaged was no other man than himself, but when the rest had gone home he remained there alone.

He sat down and buried his face in his hands. He knew what not even Martin had guessed, that his disaster had wrought his irreparable ruin. It would require every penny of his insurance money to settle his outstanding liabilities, for he had done business on the rushing plan, and had carried a stock out of all proportion to his capital. If he could only have saved that £1,000, or if he had not been so ambitious. A sharp groan escaped his lips.

Suddenly he rose and stood erect. His quick ear had caught the sound of some heavy body slowly moving over the ground.

"Who is there?"

"Only me. Is that you, guv'nor?"

John Proctor bent forward and perceived a man slowly crawling along in the shadow of a pile of joists. As the figure emerged into the moonlight he saw that the fellow dragged one leg helplessly after him. His suspicions melted away beneath his natural warmth of heart.

"Are you hurt?"

"Only a falling timber, guv'nor, but the smoke got into my eyes, and I can't see very well."

He had drawn himself to Proctor's feet and stopped, turning a little upon his side, his head propped up with his hand.

"You see, when I came through the door, something fell against me, and not seeing you, and not being able to get along very well, there were so many thieves about I was afraid they might make off with this," holding out a flat leather book, which John Proctor eagerly seized. The man went on talking in an absent way.

"I wouldn't have liked to have you think ill of me. You're the first man who gave me a chance since I got down. I wasn't always a loafer, sir. You spoke of my knowing something about the business, and to be sure I ought, if fifteen years as a sorter can teach a man anything. But when my wife died I struck off out West. It's been hard luck ever since—and my little girl—back there with her grandparents ——"

His voice seemed to fail for weakness.

"What have you eaten to-day?" asked the other sharply.

The man answered reluctantly, and almost in a tone of apology:

"You see, sir—down there among the timber—how could I?"

John Proctor was a man given more to action than speech. He addressed the man now in clear, decided tones.

"Do you think you could hold on to my back while I carried you down to the hotel?"

"Why, sir? It wouldn't be fit."

"Shut up! Put your arms round my neck."

The office and taproom of the hotel held its usual quota of respectable loafers when John Proctor entered with the uncouth figure on his back. A gurgle of laughter ran through the crowd. The majority fancied the young man's brain had been turned by his recent losses, and that his dementia had taken the form of a violent development of the weakness with which he had been accredited. The laughter suddenly ceased when the young man went straight to the manager, saying, in clear, ringing tones:

"Give me the best room you have. This man, who saved my life last night, is badly hurt. Some of you," turning to the idlers, "go at once for a doctor."

A dozen men sprang forward to relieve him of his burden, to help him carry the poor fellow to a comfortable room, where he was gently laid upon the bed. The sufferer received these attentions in silence. His dim eyes stared incredulously about the room, and into the kindly faces bending over him. That anything like this should happen to him was beyond his comprehension. How long would it last? Would they let him have one good night's rest before turning him out again? But what was this? The stalwart young timber merchant, speaking huskily to the doctor:

"And mind, McLean, do your best. I owe him more than I can tell you. Put him in good trim to take the foremanship of my yard when I get stocked up."

This silly old vagrant buried his face in his pillows and wept.

Silas Mackay.

THE TREASURES OF THE WHITE GOD

CHAPTER I.

The Hands of Justice.

MOONLIGHT on the water, one great glare of electric radiance on the land—a placid lake, a park of green; domes, spires, and minarets—a picture of fairy-land enchantment—the great World's Fair at Chicago!

The last decade of an eventful century was galloping to its end, mad and riotous with the fever heat of progress; the last hour of the day was ebbing, but, as in a vivid picture, the glow real and the glow artificial hovered over the scene, permeated it, irradiated it, made gleaming waterway and towering structure plain as day.

The blue calm lake was a royal path to a land rich with magnificence; a boulder-fretted beach led to marble esplanades. Beyond that spread all the beauties of art, all the rarities of science that opulence could tender to the intelligence of two continents.

The mosque, the castle, the mansion, the châlet, the villa, the Esquimaux hut; railways, vertical, circular, in duplicate; air ships impossible; structures blazoned from base to dome with statues and masks; tesselated floors, representing years and a lie to every square yard; edifice on edifice—the Roman, the Grecian, the Doric—in marvels of architectural beauty—a vista of wealth, invention, glory, seen only once in the living, throbbing brow of the nineteenth century—the crowning genius of six thousand years!

Yet lifeless, like some dead city deserted, humanity seemed absent, swarms of insects whirred past the spluttering lights, the waves of the lake swisked softly, a faint breeze stirred the trees. Besides these, only the echo of distant city turmoil broke the sombre silence until—clang!

The gong in the office near the great gates of the Exposition sounded forth a rude, sharp, sudden alarm. Only once—but a watchman, dozing in the shadow of his shelter box, sprang to his feet like an automaton.

A bar moved, a chain rattled, a wicket shot back. The watchman peered out.

"What is it?"

Irritation, suspicion, tinged the challenge. Prompt, imperious, came the stern reply:

"Open."

"To whom? The other gate."

Half way, in an explanatory direction, the watchman paused, and with almost absurd haste turned the great lock and swung ajar the gates.

For the midnight visitor had thrown back the lapel of his coat. There was a silvery glint, but not so blinding but that the watchman could read across the gleaming badge of authority the words:

Inspector of Police.

That name had magic to give the watchman hands of fleetness and words obsequious. The World's Fair brought not only the privileged and spendthrift of earth to its portals, but the knaves of every nation as well, and the local police was a potent factor in protecting the one class, and in watching the other.

Mr. Inspector stepped through the gate briskly; not a muscle of his fine impenetrable face moved as he beckoned to a companion to follow.

The latter was lithe, keen-eyed, every nerve constantly on the alert; his whole make-up embodied the typical detective; those restless well-shapen fingers of his showed that he could with equal celerity, neatness, and despatch snap the handcuffs over a burglar's brawny hands, or remove a diamond bracelet from the white dainty wrist of a duchess.

To this man, with a sweeping glance that took in the fenced inclosure at a look, the inspector whistled softly.

The other, with bent head and pursed lips, seemed whistling noiselessly, as if that operation added concentration and comprehension.

The while he had reversed the thin Malacca walking-stick he carried, and as he nodded ever and anon in assent to some suggestion or direction of his superior officer, he employed those restless hands of his in fashioning to a fine point a white chalk crayon.

He looked up as the inspector concluded, fitted the unshaven end of the crayon into the hollow brass fitting at the end of the stick, placed it under his arm, and started off towards the nearest building.

"Hold on!" involuntarily ejaculated the watchman. "Might I ask——"

The watchman deprecatingly ventured half a query.

"What we're after?"

"Yes."

"Don't mind. *You're* all right. *You've* the making of a good man in you. Try the local force when you leave here."

The watchman fluttered delightfully. Praise from such a high source as Mr. Inspector Grey meant something. It might mean flattery, the motive delay until his efficient assistant had pursued certain necessary investigations unhindered, but the watchman never thought of that.

"Let me see; last time I was here it was to quell the labourers' riot," pursued the inspector. "Time before, pickpockets in the visiting crowds. This time——"

He paused impressively, meanwhile his leisurely eye scanning the near distance. He smiled approvingly to himself as what resembled a blue gleam shot from a miniature dark lantern showed, flashed, and disappeared near a large temporary frame structure. Then he said:

"We are looking for a man."

"Criminal?" mumbled the watchman curiously.

"Rather."

"Reward?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Inspector, with a serene smile.

"Must be one of the workmen?"

"Exactly."

"You don't happen to know his name?"

"Most emphatically we do!" retorted Mr. Inspector briskly.

"That's a clue."

"Not his right one."

"Eh?"

"Not his right name, I say."

"Why not?"

"He dropped that two weeks since at the doors of the prison he had occupied. Real name lost in a number. His was 407."

"Long sentence?"

"A lifer."

The watchman gave utterance to an excited whistle. Here was an important case.

"And you traced him here?"

"Direct. That is, we know that Robert Lane applied for work at the city office of the Exposition. That's him."

While he spoke the inspector had started in the footsteps of his now invisible assistant.

The watchman halted as they neared the first building. He took the opportunity to reach in through the open doorway, and groped among the pails, clothing, and tools that hung there.

"I'll get the keys of the works' office," he remarked. "They keep all the books there that record the workmen. Do you see? If Robert—Robert——"

"Lane?"

"Yes, Robert Lane," repeated he eagerly. "If his name is there, it will give his number, line of apportioned labour, dormitory section, and all that. We'll trace and nab him. Do you see?"

"Why! you *are* a shrewd one, you are," commended Mr. Inspector, clapping his companion heartily on the shoulder—"a regular sleuth—a second Vidocq!"

Bantering raillery was the essence of Mr. Inspector's tones, but the watchman never noted it. He continued his groping, but suddenly started, with a glance at a small cottage just beyond them, where a light showed and vanished just then.

"Why," he exclaimed, "some one's in the works' office now."

Mr. Inspector blinked craftily.

"And the keys ain't here!" supplemented the watchman. "Some one has taken them."

That soothing imperious hand of the inspector rested on the arm of his impulsive companion.

"Don't get excited," he remarked; "my assistant has the keys."

"What!"

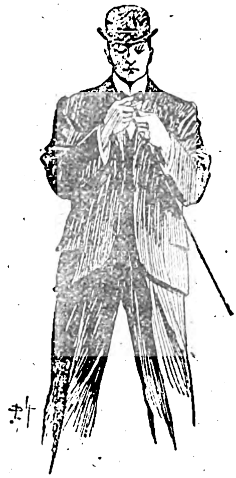
"Exactly, and he is your midnight visitor to the works' office."

The watchman turned fairly pale. A stranger inspecting the records of the Commission! Such high-handed interference!

The light faded from the office, but the inspector walked on briskly, those wonderful eyes of his looking in four different directions at once, the watchman tramping sullenly by his side.

The former paused finally, but only for a moment. He had found what he was looking for—a prearranged clue as to the operations of his assistant.

That white chalk crayon had been brought into requisition. These men were proceeding on a system of secrecy and caution that would eventuate in closing the net upon the ensnared bird at the right moment, and in the right way.



He employed those restless hands of his in fashioning to a fine point a white chalk crayon.

A broad slab of blue stone lay tilted against a pile of brick. The electric lights illuminated it clearly.

Across its surface was freshly scrawled a chronicle in white, which read simply:

Dormitory D.

The watchman could not help but observe it. He pricked up his ears, and his clouded face lightened.

"He's fixed the man!" uttered he excitedly, in the zest of the man-hunter, forgetting the mild trickery of his companion.

"It looks so," nodded the inspector sagely.

"Dormitory D—I'll show you——"

"No need," interrupted the other brusquely. "Dean always leaves a trail when we are working in harness."

The "trail" was a series of chalk marks, and they were certain guides as to the progress of Detective Dean. They covered rock, brick, and timber—two criss-cross marks, made hurriedly, but always with the point of the angle indicating a certain direction.

"Here we are," announced the watchman, pausing finally before a rude wooden structure, two storeys high.

"Ah! this is where the workmen sleep?"

"Yes."

"This is Dormitory D. Door open. Here's your keys, left in the lock. Thanks, my friend."

The watchman received the keys with dubious welcome.

"Go quietly," warned the inspector, as they started up the stairs. "Our man is no ordinary fellow—quick as a ferret, and full of resources. He made one of the most remarkable escapes from prison."

Mr. Inspector's stern lips closed like clamps as they reached the top of the staircase.

It looked into an immense room, dimly lighted by turned down gas jets.

Built of frail timber, and running its entire length, were two rows of bunks, or rather partitioned off rooms; they were roof-less, and fronted each other across a ten-foot passage way. Behind them were the rows of side windows to the structure proper.

What had closed Mr. Inspector Grey's lips, and what now held the watchman silent, was a vision of the lithe, active detective, who, standing in the passage way, lifted a significant finger warningly.

He never noticed the watchman as he approached them with noiseless feet, that seemed shod with velvet.

"All right!" he whispered to the inspector.

"Man here?"

"Yes."

"Which room?"

"That's the puzzle. See here."

The detective lowered even that whispering tone of his, and a brief but evidently important colloquy ensued, during which they cast frequent glances at the watchman.

Then, a decision apparently arrived at, Mr. Inspector approached the watchman, that old serene smile of his coming to the surface.

"Here's where you come in!" he announced blandly.

"Eh?" muttered the other, quivering.

"You can help us. If any trouble comes to you, I'll guarantee a better place on the local force."

"You will!" ejaculated the watchman, brightening up.

"I've said it."

"What do you want?"

"There's over two hundred men asleep in those little rooms."

"Just two hundred and forty."

"We want to find out in which one our man is."

"Robert Lane?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Inspector.

The watchman reflected. He turned over a score of rapid plans in his mind. Then his face flushed excitedly.

"I have it!" he breathed convincedly.

"Good! only make no mistake. A lifer on a furlough sleeps with one eye and both ears open."

"Never fear! Leave it all to me."

The watchman, regarded engrossedly by the others, advanced to the centre of the broad passage-way.

Suddenly he lifted his stentorian voice—

"Robert Lane!"

Falling sharply upon that sleeping air, disturbed only by low, steady breathing, the effect was like a pistol-shot in a close room.

There was a stir, a palpable rustle, in one of the rooms. Thither Mr. Inspector glanced. Thither, striking the instinctive crouch of a tiger, Detective Dean bent one ear, his fingers working restively.

The next moment, however, from a compartment three doors removed, sounded a firm wide-awake voice—

"Here!"

Instantly attention was directed thither.

"Get up," spoke the watchman again.

"What's wanted?"

"New line of work. Orders."

The watchman winked at the two officers with a grim sense of humour, as he pictured a new line of work, indeed!—picking oakum or breaking stones.

Then he waited. Three pairs of eyes were riveted on the door of the compartment, awaiting the appearance of their man.

One minute—two minutes—three. The watchman began to grow impatient.

He approached the door.

"Lane, Robert Lane, wake up!" he called out.

There was no reply this time.

"Do you hear me? Wake up, wake up!" he vociferated, pounding on the thin door until it rattled.

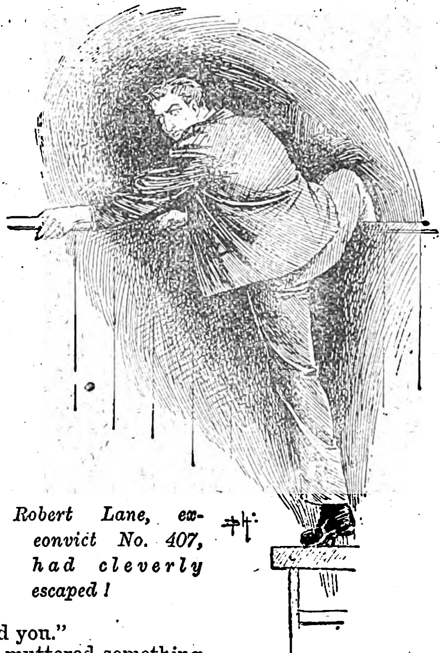
"E—eh?" growled a sleepy voice.

"Wake up, I say!"

"What for?" came the lazy drawl.

"What for!" snapped out the watchman. "Didn't I just tell you?—special work."

"I never heard you."



Robert Lane, ex-convict No. 407, had cleverly escaped!

Mr. Inspector muttered something about "sleepy head," and grasped the revolver in his pocket more tightly.

Mr. Detective Dean started, and uttered a barely perceptible "Ah!" and "Those two voices were not the same!" Then, unperceived by the others, he moved lightly as a cat to the door of the compartment behind which the rustle had sounded when that name, "Robert Lane," had first been spoken.

The other two awaited the appearance of the last speaker. The inspector stood at the side of the door, a pair of handcuffs in one hand, ready to pounce upon his victim the first moment he should become visible. The watchman, expecting now a final crisis, moved nervously from one foot to the other.

"Night work's double pay, so I don't mind," sounded from the compartment, and then the inside button jarred back, and the door opened.

Mr. Inspector, however, made no forward pounce, as a half-dressed man shambled into the corridor.

"It's not our man!" gasped the officer.

"What!" panted the watchman. "See here, ain't you Robert Lane?" This with a vigorous shake at the man's arm.

"Eh! me? No."

"You answered to the name!"

"I didn't."

"Why——"

"You mean Lane, that fellow that came here yesterday?"

"Yes, yes!" assented the inspector eagerly.

"Clean-shaven face, dark hair; tall as you are?"

"That's him!" nodded Mr. Inspector.

"That's his room"—and the man pointed straightway to the door of the very compartment from which the rustling sound had proceeded.

Mr. Inspector arched his eyebrows strangely.

"A trick," he muttered. "The man took warning, climbed over the partition into that other room, and diverted our attention to this fellow——"

The watchman interrupted the speaker with an intelligent cry.

Forthwith he sped to the first compartment indicated.

He waited not for parley, but with one vigorous kick he sent the door crashing inward from its hinges.

Then agape, he pointed to the cot and other furniture of the compartment.

"Look!" he choked out simply.

"Yes, I see evidences of a hasty flight—disorder," returned the inspector grimly. "He stepped to this chair"—the inspector imitated the movement. "Aha!"

That word expressed volumes, for it was caused by a glance over the top of the board partition.

Beyond, the line of windows of the room proper showed.

One was open. It told the story. Robert Lane, ex-convict No. 407, had cleverly escaped!

"He's gone!" muttered the inspector, coming into the corridor again. "It's a free-for-all chase now! Dean! quick—where's Dean?"

Where, indeed? For the inspector's assistant had mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

The End of a Long Chase.

A NETTLED expression crossed the inspector's face as he realised that some one had blundered in leaving the side windows of Dormitory D unguarded, and that some one, probably, himself.

Hopeful relief succeeded, however, as he noted the absence of his trusted assistant. Had Dean anticipated the ruse of the missing man—was he already on his trail?

He did not impart his anxieties to the watchman. What refined interest could the man with his brain take in the emotions of a man who knew that his own reputation, the peace of mind of his employers, a mighty import, attached to the recapture of Robert Lane, escaped convict No. 407?

Wealth, influence, the protection of some great interest, depended on the housing in of the fugitive once more. He was no ordinary prisoner—this much the inspector suspected; his recapture meant a princely reward from opulent hands—this much the inspector knew.

"Come," he said, simply, but sharply, after a moment of deep, excited thought.

"Where?" blurted out the watchman.

"On the trail of that man. He is somewhere in the grounds. About the other watchmen?"

"Twenty on duty—at the gates and various buildings for fire and all that."

"They can be reached?"

"Simultaneously and speedily."

"How?"

The watchman ran down the stairs, and the inspector, following him, sped to the works' office.

An alphabet electrical transmitter lay open on a desk. He tapped its centre key, after lighting the gas.

Instantly a series of responsive taps sounded from a keyboard attached to the wall near by, and as many as twenty numbers in succession showed out, as some electrical contrivance, operated at the various guard-posts, sent their tiny, japanned shuttle fluttering back.

"All right," announced the watchman. "The guards are waiting. Give your instructions."

"Close every guarded avenue of exit against Robert Lane; height 5 feet 8 inches, weight 160 pounds, fair complexion, dark hair"—and so on, in a monotonous drawl, the inspector called out his message, while the watchman tapped its letters from the instrument to the various stations of watchmen round the grounds.

"That'll stop him," he muttered convincedly. "He can't scale a fence without being seen; he can't open a gate unless he kills a watchman first. There's only one other way."

"Ah, one other way?" insinuated the inspector.

"Yes; the lake front."

Mr. Inspector started at this. Then forthwith he led the way from the office.

They passed building after building, crossed the bridge, lined the esplanade, and neared the open waters, where a great model warship was in process of construction. Just beyond it a canal had been cut, semi-circular in shape, running from the lake and into that body of water again, some six hundred feet distant. Employed as a harbour for constructing boats, and to afford dockage, its shores were littered with timber and iron.

Just as they approached this spot the moon went under a cloud. The inspector halted.

"I fancy our man has made for the lake," he muttered. "There's any amount of water craft lying about that he might impress into service, get beyond the limits of the grounds, land south or north, and skip for new fields."

He scanned the darkened surface of the lake keenly, but discerned that beyond the radius of the electric lights a score of boatmen might be rowing about unseen.

"If I could find Dean," he began speculatively. "That's him!"

With a hopeful start he peered eagerly about him, for just then, low but perfectly clear and distinct, a peculiar whistle cut the air.

"The detective?" queried the watchman palpitatingly.

"Yes; that's his signal."

"It came from near the canal."

Mr. Inspector's reply was to spring from the spot, and he drew his revolver as he did so.

The interested watchman, following movements and direction, viewed a startling scene at just that moment.

Like a fox breaking from cover, a wild form had dashed into view from behind a pile of timber. In a vivid flash of recollection the watchman recognised the new-comer from the description he had telegraphed to his *confrères* not half an hour ago.

The full refulgence of the electric lamps revealed a trim, athletic form, and features strongly marked with the characteristic one observes on old Roman coins—a profile pure and classic as that of a king of tragedy.

Directly at his heels, covering the ground in prodigious bounds, sped Mr. Detective Dean.

The inspector, with an excited shout, cut across a dock to intercept the fugitive, while his assistant kept on in a straight line, as if determined to tire out the man he was running down.

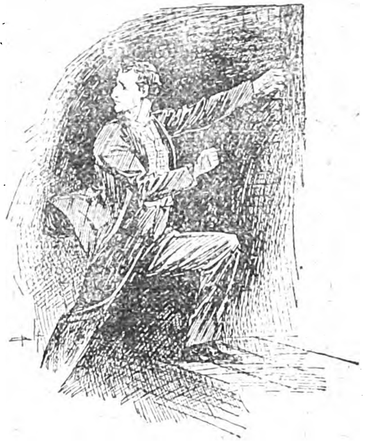
The latter came to a momentary, dismayed pause as he reached the banks of the canal. In one swift glance he took in the situation; in one quivering moment of space he reflected, decided, acted.

Like a stag before the hounds, it was evident that his original intention had been to take to the water and leave no trail, but the lake was fully five hundred feet yet distant. Pursuer number one was hot on his heels; pursuer number two might head him off ere he accomplished half the space.

In this predicament he scanned the canal. It was wide, it was deep, but once across it, once on the island it formed, he could gain the farther beach. He was an expert swimmer; freedom seemed assured.

Splash!

Without a particle of hesitation he leapt over the dock. The water lay ten feet below. He struck it with a blinding splatter.



The full refulgence of the electric lamps revealed a trim, athletic form.

On the shore, frantic with excitement, the inspector stood regarding him, levelling his revolver, lowering it—resolute, undecided by turns.

"Don't shoot," spoke Dean, in low, purring accents of confidence. "He's trapped."

"I don't see it."

"Wait!"

Splash! A second more, and the resolute assistant, denuded of hat, coat, and vest, was in the canal, in his white shirt, resembling some mighty swan amid those gruesome shadows.

The fugitive reached the opposite shore first. He trod water, and looked up blankly at the unbroken log wall that reached perpendicularly to the top of the dock.

Then, groping for and finding various nails, interstices, and projections that admitted of a hand-hold, he began to slowly and laboriously elevate himself.

Near to the very top, panting, well-nigh exhausted, he wavered. His hand dug into a cavity, the rotten wood surrounding it began to crumble. He faltered in his steadiness, fell back, and then, with one desperate upward spring, made a wild clutch for an enormous spike that protruded from a great log lying directly among a heap on the wharf planking.

With a vast sigh of relief he dragged himself upward. An ejaculation of dismay escaped his lips as he was about to pull himself to a position of security. It blended with accents of horror the ensuing moment, for his action had precipitated a direful catastrophe.

His weight had become bulked in a desperate clutch on the spike. The sturdy piece of iron was securely driven, but the immense log in which it fitted was not, as the refugee had supposed the coping piece of the dock, but a loose timber, which, carelessly projecting over the edge of the wharf, needed only a push, a dragging pull, to disturb its equilibrium, to send it hurling to the watery void over which the fugitive hung suspended.

A cold horror came into his heart, an instinctive shudder seized his frame, as, with an ominous creaking sound, the great timber swayed, quivered, and groaningly began to slide out of place.

His eye quailed as, confronted with a choice of two terrible alternatives, he wavered, uncertain how to act, foreseeing mutilation, death inevitable, in the next fierce downward plunge of the mute, formidable monster his own rashness had changed into an irresistible engine of destruction.

To drop back into the water meant to be crushed a second later by the descending log. To climb up that seemed impossible, for already the log, turning, wrenched his arm down and under, and tore his clutch from the sharp-edged spike.

In the presence of death a moment seems an eternity. Convict 407 had time to think, to calculate, to act, but barely time. A grim, desperate expression in his fear-haunted eyes—such an expression as the face of the shipwrecked mariner wears when a distant sail is sighted—he described a sudden, a peculiar, an apparently aimless movement.

It was to fling himself clear of the log by springing upward with the agility and nerve of a practised gymnast.

Then a wild, frantic grope, and from his eager lips fell a gasping, broken murmur of relief and hope commingled.

"Safe!"

For his groping fingers had struck and clutched an iron ring sunk in the dock planking. About the smooth metal circle they closed with a grip like that of a giant.

They saw him hang to the ring, limp but resolute, by one hand. Then they saw his body sway, heard a grinding crash, and the inspector fairly panted:

"Mercy! the log!"

"He's done for!" gulped the watchman.

A wild scream of vivid pain rang from the lips of the man upon whom their eyes were centred.

Something had happened. The rolling timber had continued its progress. It slid under him, flinging the upper half of his body out like a distended balloon, and then poised for a final dive into the canal, whirled, caught one of his feet against the side of the slimy dock wall, crushed it downward, almost wrenched the man free, and with a mighty splurge landed in the water.

It was the grinding tear of the timber that had wrung from lips not unused to torture the cry that echoed like a shriek across the silent scene.

Mr. Detective Dean had placidly viewed the manœuvres of the fugitive with such a practical, sanguine look as the fowler bestows on the bird struggling in the meshes of a sure net. His quick eye foresaw the peril of venturing too near the wharf edge. He trod water until the log had descended. Then a few lusty strokes brought him to the dock.

He made a leisurely survey of the frowning face of bolted timbers, and finally clambered at a favourable point to the top of the wharf.

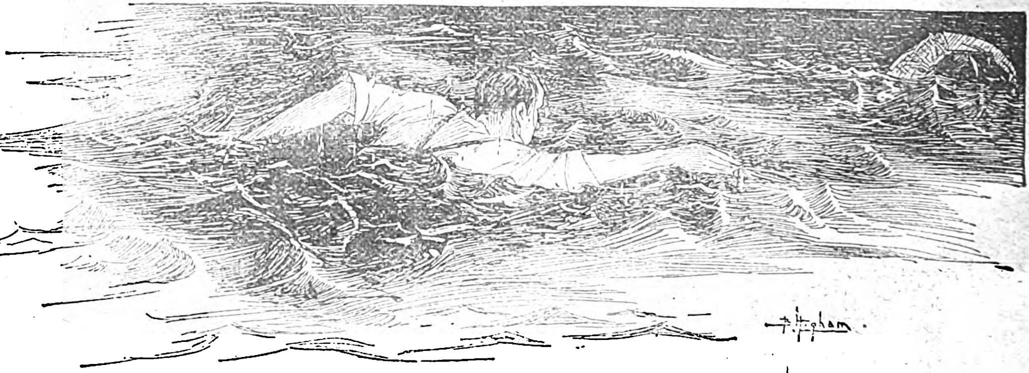
"Hurry! hurry!" sang out the watchman from across the canal, dancing from one foot to the other in suspense, and pointing excitedly, "he's making for the water."

The inspector's assistant paid but little heed to the words. He swept the island with a calculating eye. Nearing the lake was his man, but a glance showed that he was no longer in condition to cope with the ability and perseverance of the officer.

He was limping painfully, dragging a shattered foot behind him, in a way that showed that only desperation, the last flaming resolution of a doughty mind, sustained him. He neared the edge of the lake, gazed out upon the void of the waters, made a movement to spring into them, hesitated, turned, saw the detective approaching, and then, with a startled ejaculation, limped to a rude water craft moored near by.

The detective saw him reach its deck. It was a long flat boat, with a shallow hold—a scow littered with shavings and boards. Amid this *débris* the fugitive disappeared.

A satisfied smile played about the lips of the ferret who had run his game to cover. His victim, caged, crippled, helpless, was at his mercy completely. Mr. Detective Dean was a wise man, however. He knew his business clearly. His ability had tracked the fugitive, but the honour of the actual arrest must fall to the lot of his superior officer. It was policy to thus apportion the case in hand—to the inspector all the directing ability and the reward; to the grim, silent assistant all the work—and his enigmatic eyes flashed peculiarly as he seemed to chuckle inwardly over an interest in the case, a knowledge of some minor details hidden even from the devouring mind of Mr. Inspector Grey.



The resolute assistant, denuded of coat, hat, and vest, was in the canal.

He took out his signal whistle. Its gamut was limited, but in some mysterious way it informed the distant inspector of his position and wishes, for there was a return whistle. Then fixing his eyes upon the boat, particularly watching the water exposure of the craft, the detective seated himself on a pile of sand, and waited patiently, placidly.

Five—ten—fifteen minutes passed by. Then two hurrying, perspiring forms were outlined, coming from the north end of the island. The inspector and the watchman had run round to the frail swing-bridge there.

"Well! where is he?" panted the inspector, puffing laboriously, and glaring disappointedly all about him.

The assistant nodded towards the lake, took out a cigar case, offered it to his superior with a bow, and to the watchman in turn, arched his eyebrows at their refusal, rather irritably given, for their anxieties were centred to the fate of the fugitive, and selecting a weed himself, lit it, and remarked with exasperating coolness:

"He's just resting. Shall we stir him up?"

"Resting! where?" projected the inspector.

"On that boat yonder."

"I don't see him."

The imperturbable detective, puffing placidly at his cigar, arose and directed his steps towards the craft in question.

It was secured by a rope from a stern post, which was tied round an iron crowbar driven into the sand. The bow swung out into the lake, and the boat swayed as the waves tugged at it, as if to tear it free and sport with it.

Dean stepped aboard, and the others followed him. He walked over to a heap of shavings and stirred them up with his foot. His eyebrows arched a trifle—no fugitive in hiding there!

A heap of boards was next investigated. The face of the detective looked blank.

"Hello," he uttered simply, and he gazed seawards thoughtfully.

"He ain't here," spoke the inspector testily.

"I fear not," responded Dean, his assurance deserting him. "I kept a close eye on the boat and the water."

"He's slipped you — swam away."

"Impossible!"

"But he is not here?"

"No—ah!"

The detective glided to the stern of the boat. An uncovered hatchway showed. Balancing himself on the edge, he peered down into the darksome void, bent his ear, listened intently, and then sung out in a stentorian tone:

"Robert Lane, the game is up. We want you!"

No reply.

The inspector and his companion crowded closer to the side of the assistant.

"Is he down there?" queried the former.

"Yes."

"Sure?" asked the watchman.

"His foot was bleeding. There's the trail," spoke Dean, indicating various lurid stains round the hatchway frame.

"Let me take him."

The excited watchman thought a share of the honour of arrest would raise him in the estimation of his employers. Before the others could deter him, he had sprung into the open hatchway, seized the notched post that served as a ladder, and began a descent into the hole.

"In the name of the law!" sounded his voice grandiloquent, but hollow, and then it suddenly changed.

"Murder—help—oh! the ruffian—pull me out!"

A frantic hand waved spasmodically into view. The astonished Dean seized it, and dragged its owner out upon the deck of the boat, where the watchman forthwith applied himself to rubbing his knee, and uttering doleful plaints of pain and misery.

"What's the trouble?" demanded the inspector gruffly.

"He attacked me."

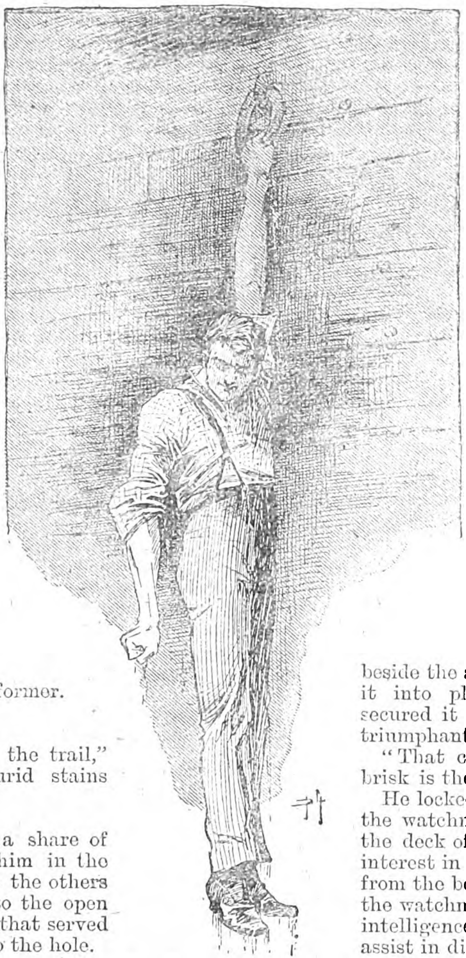
"Who did?"

"The man in the hold. Oh, he's there fast enough, never fear! And in fighting trim, too; he struck at me with a stick."

"Ah, he means fight, does he?" muttered the inspector. "I'll soon settle this. Robert Lane!"

He advanced to the hatchway and shouted the name sternly down into the hold.

There was no response.



They saw him hang to the ring.

"We have you cornered; escape is impossible. You are injured, and need attention. Come up and surrender yourself, and you shall receive considerate treatment. Otherwise——"

Click!

The inspector recoiled. That keen, sharp, metallic sound was ominous, aggressive, menacing.

"Stand back, or I shall fire!" came the quick, impressive words from below. "Mr. Inspector Grey, liberty is dear to me. I shall fight for it. I am armed. You shall never carry me back to the living tomb from which I escaped."

"He means it; don't tempt him," purred the ready assistant, with a firm hand gently drawing his superior officer out of range of a possible shot from the hold. "Don't you see, he has us at a decided disadvantage? We dare not venture in range while we do not know where he may be lurking in the darkness."

"Then?——"

"The simplest way out."

"And that is?"

"Wait for daylight."

Mr. Inspector Grey thought of his comfortable bed at the station, and moved restively, irritably.

"Or get half-a-dozen watchmen to help us. He'll probably hesitate shooting at a man who is not his natural hated enemy—a full-fledged police officer."

"Very good," growled Grey.

"And meantime——"

The detective approached the hatchway opening. Its cover lay beside the aperture. With a deft jerk he flung it into place. Flipping the iron bar that secured it through the grooves, he announced triumphantly:

"That cages him safe. Now then, my man, brisk is the word!"

He locked his arm confidently through that of the watchman, flinging his lighted cigar upon the deck of the boat, and centreing his entire interest in directing his companion. He walked from the boat a short distance, to impress upon the watchman's mind the necessity of haste and intelligence in bringing half-a-dozen officers to assist in dislodging the fugitive. The inspector followed them mechanically.

The watchman sped for the bridge, and the detective started to retrace his steps.

"He can't escape, but we'll get nearer the boat," he began, when the inspector interrupted him.

"The boat!" he repeated, with a wild start—"where is the boat?"

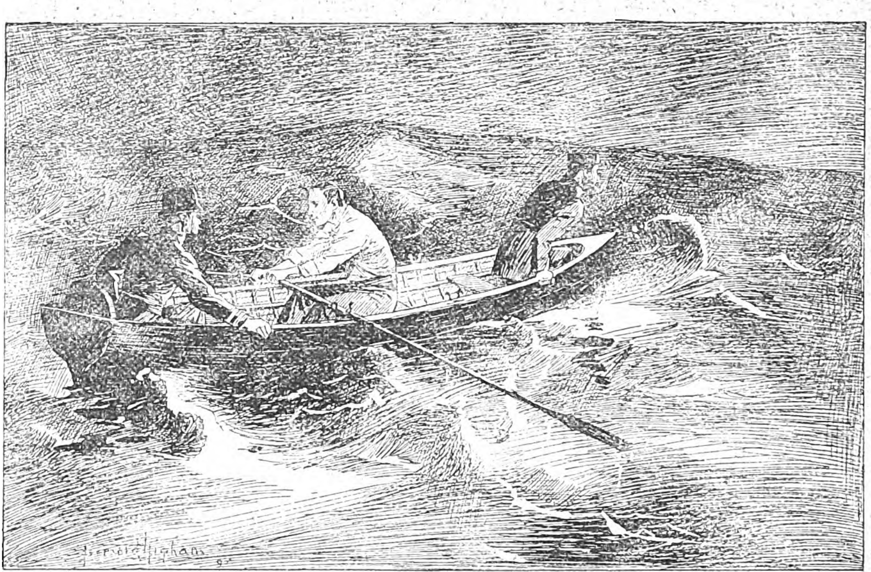
Where? indeed! They were quite a distance beyond the radiance of the electric lights, but hitherto the faint reflection and the clear moonlight had held the old, flat boat in vivid outline.

Just now a quick breeze had sprung up from the north, and scurrying rain clouds shut out the sky. The sudden transition to gloom was complete, but not sufficient to prevent a sight of the boat, had it been there.

It was *not* there. Mr. Inspector strained his eyes, with an ejaculation of alarm. His companion darted to the spot where the craft had bobbed and floated a minute ago.

The inspector coming up, found him staring vaguely at a limp, flexible object in his hand. It was the rope that had secured the boat. One end was still attached to the iron crowbar driven into the sand. The other showed a waxy, compact stub of strands, where some keen blade had severed it at a blow.

"What does it mean?" gasped the bewildered inspector.



"The last of convict 407," murmured the watchman.

"It means that our man has slipped us again," returned the detective. "Three times, and now—he's gone!"

"How?"

"I noticed a window in the stern of the hold—a mere port-hole. He found himself locked in, overheard our plans, saw us leave the boat, resolved on a desperate exploit, reached through the window, cut the rope—puff! The wind and the waves did the rest. See! look steady! There's the boat floating out to sea."

"In the teeth of a storm, and he locked in!" muttered the inspector.

He lifted his voice to call after the watchman. In a minute or two that individual came running, wonderingly, back to the beach.

A few words explained the situation.

"There's a rowing-boat in the canal. Shall I get it?" he asked.

"Yes—yes; we must overtake him," assented the inspector sharply.

"If we can keep the boat in sight," supplemented the detective, peering keenly seaward. "It's out of view."

"What's that?" interrupted his companion, seizing his arm suddenly.

"What?" queried the detective.

"Look!"

Mr. Inspector pointed across the dark expanse of waters.

"Ah! a light," spoke Dean.

"No, a fire. See the flames! Dean, it's the raft!"

The imperturbable assistant started for the first time. A look akin to horror came into his face. He shivered as a mere point of light grew to a waving flame, and this, forking out, sent upwards a score of seething swords of fire.

"It is the boat," he muttered. "The cigar—the lighted cigar—Good God! I carelessly threw it on the deck. It fell among the shavings. The wind fanned it. The man on that craft is doomed unless we reach and rescue him. Rouse yourself, Grey. It is no longer a criminal we are after, but a beleaguered human being in deadly peril."

In feverish suspense the inspector stood glaring at the burning craft. The detective paced the sands like a caged lion. He fairly ran into the water as the watchman rounded the canal outlet and rowed along the beach.

He sprang in and took up the oars, running the yawl to where the inspector stood.

"Jump aboard!" he ordered sharply.

"I'm afraid we're too late."

"We can only try. The boat is drifting south. It cannot be more than half a mile out."

The watchman at the stern, the inspector at the bow, the detective made the little craft fairly leap through the white-crested waves on the errand of rescue.

They neared the burning boat.

Of a sudden the blazing flaring mass gave a great hissing splutter.

Its stern sank, then it rocked, the waves lapped the thwarts, submerged them, and then—a gaunt, blackened skeleton—the charred wreck sank in an eddying vortex.

"The last of convict 407," murmured the watchman, in horror-stricken accents.

"The reward lost," said Mr. Inspector.

"The Burgoyne mystery a mystery still. What will Richard Sheldon say now?" purred the detective softly.

The wind came up in stronger gusts, a pall fell over the waters, and amid gruesome mists and sudden gloom, Robert Lane, convict No. 407, seemed to have been swallowed up in the jaws of the blackest night that ever hung above the earth.

(*To be continued.*)

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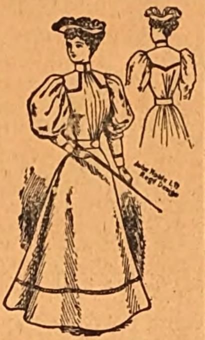

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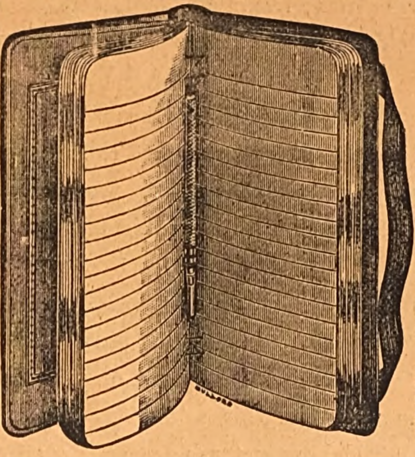

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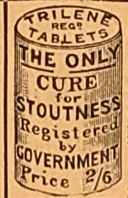

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A VERY FOOLISH YOUNG MAN.

Hundreds of years ago, a young man belonging to a rich and powerful family turned his back upon his father's castle and went to live in a thick forest. A few friends went with him. They built a house for themselves and resolved to live what they considered a holy life. Their leader set an example of austerity. He lashed himself with whips; he wore the coarsest clothing; he slept on a bare plank. What he ate was scarcely sufficient to keep him alive, and so wretched in quality that even the dogs turned from it. Of course the young man had indigestion and dyspepsia. He persevered in abusing his stomach until his sense of taste was destroyed. He would swallow chalk or fruit rinds as readily as you who read this would eat Yorkshire pudding. This suicidal conduct was generally admired, and his neighbours looked upon him as a saint.

"I always had a bad taste in my mouth," says a gentleman who lives not far from Manchester. "It was worst in the morning, and I could not enjoy anything I ate, because all my food tasted bad."

Consider for a moment how useful is the sense of taste. It warns us when anything unwholesome enters the mouth, for the rule is that whatever is offensive to the taste is injurious to the body. The rule has exceptions, and the reverse does not always hold good, because harmless medicines are not always pleasant to swallow. Like the self-denying hero of the middle ages, Mr. Alfred Ogden suffered from the effects of an incompetent stomach, and one of these effects was the bad taste he tells us of. The trouble began in the spring of 1892, and one of the first signs that something was wrong was a feeling of dulness and languor. Our correspondent says he felt tired after the least exertion. When he had managed to swallow some food, despite the bad taste, he felt as if a dagger had pierced his breast, and gone right back to the shoulder blades. It was with great difficulty that he could attend to his business.

At night, weary and worn out with pain, Mr. Ogden tried in vain to sleep. The demon of dyspepsia haunted him and gave him no rest. He took medicines, and at times he felt a little relief.

"I continued in this state for twelve months," he writes. In April, 1893, I read one day, in a little book left at my house, of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. Mr. Catterall, the chemist, of Church Street, sold me a bottle; and a few doses relieved me greatly. Two more bottles completed the cure, and now I am perfectly healthy; and have been ever since. My wife, who suffered from a sluggish liver a long time, has derived great benefit from Mother Seigel's Syrup. Yours truly (Signed), Alfred Ogden, 4, College Croft, Eccles, near Manchester, January 26th, 1894."

The man we have told you of, who went to live the life of a hermit in the woods, lost his taste because he outraged his palate. He ate things never intended for human food. He was rightly served for a fanatic and a fool.

The bad taste of which Mr. Ogden speaks, however, was that of bile coming up into his throat and mouth from his deranged stomach; where bile is never found except in cases in which it gets out of its proper place —namely, in the bowels. We must remember that in indigestion the stomach does very little of its natural work. Instead of dissolving and separating the food, turning part of it into good blood and expelling the rest from the body, the stomach merely retains it as any other bag or receptacle would do. Then, through the action of the heat and moisture the food ferments, turns sour, rots, and throws off gases and acids, some of which now and then arise into the mouth, causing the bad taste and the "wind" so often experienced by the sufferer.

These, and other symptoms, can only be gotten rid of by renewing the action of the stomach, which is accomplished by Mother Seigel's Syrup, as in Mr. Ogden's case. So that whenever you feel any of these signs, you will know what they mean, and what to do to cure them.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 363. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 14TH, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

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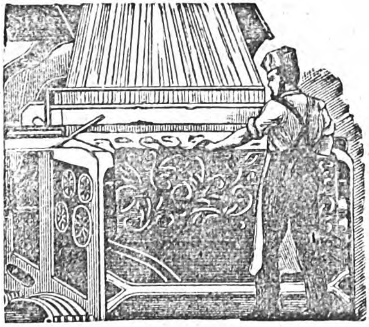
GIVEN AWAY.



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With every Carpet we shall ABSOLUTELY GIVE AWAY a very handsome Rug to match, or we will send two CARPETS and Two RUGS for 10s. 6d.

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"Warwickshire.

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Mrs. THOS. WEBB, 497, Spring Villa, Lower Ince, near Wigan, writes: "The Carpets and Rugs which you sent me are very nice, and give every satisfaction. They are really grand value for the money. I have shown them to a great number of my friends, who have expressed their admiration."

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BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,

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Weak Stomach, Impaired Digestion,
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SULPHOLINE LOTION

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ABDOMINAL OBESITY A SPECIALTY.
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Neuralgic Headache and all Nerve Pains Removed by BUNTER'S NERVINE. All Chemists, 1s. 1½d.

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SHORT STORIES
ROMANCE
LOVE
ADVENTURE
WAR
HUMOUR
PATHOS

No. 363.] For the Week ending December 14th, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

The Veil of the Temple.

BERT STANHOPE tipped his chair back against the mantelpiece, and filled in the intervals of comment on the game with cigarette smoke. When the first cigarette was finished he lighted another, and continued in his absorption. After a while one of the players put his cue in the rack, and Stanhope called out to him:

"Going, Spaulding?"

"Yes; I'm going to call on Mrs. Martin. You know her, don't you? Why, to be sure you do. She who was Esther Parkhurst, with whom you played the moth and candle act."

"Yes. I know her—or did once."

"Are you still on calling terms?"

"Who can tell?"

"You'd better find out, then. It's her first reception day this season. You'd do well to go up. She's a power in the land."

"Maybe I will, later on. What's her number?"

"24, H—— Street. Big white stone house."

Stanhope went over to the window and looked out at the trees in the square. The leaves were just falling, and the place looked desolate, with its occasional passers-by. He commented, for the benefit of the curtains, that the club might have been in some important thoroughfare as befitted the august body whose members it sometimes sheltered.

Then he fell to looking between the bars of the past, and watching the dead actions and thoughts as they moved about, some nearer, and some afar off. He wondered how he would be received if he should go to Mrs. Martin's. There was no doubt that he would make an effect, but its nature was problematical.

He had only just returned to town, and this was her first day since his return. It would look well, and might result well if he should hasten to pay his respects. She was one of those persons with whom it was well to be on excellent terms. With the young and attractive wife of a man of immense influence, the making of a young officer of ambitious tendencies lay quite within her power.

Stanhope thought of what had been, as he flicked the ashes from his cigarette; thought of what had been, smiled, took his hat, and then sauntered out of the club. It was not a long walk, only a few streets, but he went slowly, for he was still uncertain and undecided as to the proper course to pursue if Esther should make a scene, turn

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faint or flush deeply. She had been given to displaying every emotion.

The house was certainly imposing, it seemed to him. Little dark Esther must be rather out of place in anything so stately. There were a dozen or more carriages in front of it, and as he went up the steps a woman he knew came out and looked up and down for her pair.

She saw Stanhope, and welcomed him effusively; a *salon* filled with officers was the ambition of her life, and when the officers were of this one's sort—she invited him then and there to dinner. He accepted and took her to her carriage, then went into the house with restored confidence. He could see Esther, as he took off his overcoat, through the wide doorway. She was so entirely unchanged that Stanhope grew nervous again and watched her anxiously as the footman called "Captain Stanhope," and Mrs. Martin turned towards him with the delighted, meaningless smile of a London hostess.

Evidently the name meant nothing to her ear, but a gleam of recognition gave her face more charm as she held out her hand.

"Why, I am more than glad to see you, Mr.—no, it's Captain now, isn't it?—Captain Stanhope. I heard you were back, and wondered if you would come in to-day. You're not in the least changed in appearance, nor in heart either, I suppose; so you will be glad to hear that Miss Francis—Merton Francis, you know—is here. She is quite as fascinating as ever, and you are to go in and see her."

The manner was certainly correct, but Stanhope was not hopeful.

"Very well, I'll go to Miss Francis, if I may see you alone later."

She nodded her head as she turned to welcome an old but imposing couple, who were announced as General and Mrs. Starling.

The Captain's humour improved. He found Miss Francis, and she, too, was glad to see him; he felt that the lot of the returned wanderer—provided he does not wander too long—is indeed pleasant. There were a number of girls, those in their third, fourth, and indefinite seasons, a couple of matrons, and a few men, mostly very young or very old, drinking with evident delight.

These wandered away in time, and before a new being came up to claim her attention, Stanhope had led Miss Francis to believe that it was solely on her account that he had come. At least she appeared to believe it. One of her greatest charms was that she never repulsed a compliment, whether spoken or implied, and thereby did not harass him who complimented, nor appear self-conscious. Stanhope led the subject to Mrs. Martin.

"She seems about the same as ever."

"She is, but you talk as if it were eighteen years instead of eighteen months since we last saw you."

"It seems longer than it really is, a great deal longer."

"Does it? Time passes quickly here."

And then a most unwelcome feminine friend broke up the *tête-à-tête*.

"Come and see me, Captain Stanhope," called out Miss Francis.

Stanhope bowed and wandered off. He met a retired officer, who took him into one corner and made him give a history of several troops and a score of old comrades.

Stanhope disliked reminiscencing, and tried to break away, but Major Harvey was unrelenting. The callers were beginning to thin out, and Mrs. Martin had dropped into a chair. The Major's wife rescued Stanhope at last, leading her husband away.

There were only a few stragglers left. Miss Francis had gone up-stairs for her wraps and came down again, looking younger andmost be witching in her velvet and furs. She stood beside a tall, green-shaded lamp for a moment, drawing on her gloves and giving Stanhope time to admire her. She was colourless and clear-cut enough to stand the trying light. When she left Stanhope joined Esther.

"Come and sit in the window seat; you look tired."

"I am. Standing so long is very trying. Thank you. I do like cushions. Yes, I'm perfectly comfortable."

She had stopped the business-like smiling which had strained her nerves all the afternoon, and only looked up at him with her large, dreamy eyes, and gave a contented sigh.

Stanhope waited for her to speak, but she did not.

"You look worn out, poor child," he said finally; then he remembered that he had said almost the same thing a moment earlier.

"Only a little; but I lose my colour very easily."

"Yes, I know."

Another silence, which Mrs. Martin took so calmly that it was evident she was at her ease. Stanhope would rather have had her chatter in commonplaces. He began again:

"It seems so odd to see you again in this way. Mrs. Martin—you who were Esther Parkhurst eighteen months ago."

"Yes."

Stanhope kept on. "You must be very young yet; not quite twenty-one, I should think. Yes, about two months short of that;" and then he watched her narrowly. "You are young, but I wonder if you are happy?" His eyes grew very soft, but she was not looking.

"No, I think not. I never was very happy, I believe."

"Never? Since when?"

"Oh, since I was nineteen, perhaps."

Her boldness was so sudden that the man considered all barriers broke down by it. He leant nearer, and she did not move away.

"Since then I have not been happy either; wretched, in fact. Since that time I went away."

There was a slow smile on Mrs. Martin's lips, and it went away as slowly. Distinctly she meant it to be taken for incredulity.

"You don't believe me," protested Stanhope. "You never did trust me. Listen!" He gave a laugh which would have done credit to a stage villain, and which made Mrs. Martin shift away. "Listen, I am going to tell you a story, a fairy story, we'll call it, because it all seems so unreal now. We will make all our commonplace mortals grandees, our heroine shall be a princess, the hero a knight, and the scene a royal court.

"Once upon a time there lived a beautiful princess, a princess with black hair—like the raven's breast is the accepted simile, I believe—and large, brown eyes. She was very lovely and lovable—but, there, you have doubtless heard of her so often that my unaccustomed words must seem weak. Well, the princess saw one day, at her father's court, a knight who had nothing but his love and his service to give her. But it was not the custom in the land where the princess reigned supreme to proclaim the losing of one's heart. The knight abode near his beautiful lady-love for many months, and could not tear himself from her side. And the princess returned his love. For a time they were happy; oh, very happy, Esther. No words had been spoken, but each knew the other's heart. Tell me if my story goes wrong."

"It is right. Go on."

"May I? There came a time when the knight was forced to go away, for, being a soldier, he had to obey. So the knight went to the princess at parting. Shall I go on?"

"Yes."

"As he turned away after the leave-taking, going with a heavy heart, the princess called him back and—how shall I say it?—called him back and asked him why he had never told her of the love she knew he felt, why he was going away in silence. The soldier—that is the knight—could not explain, can never explain, being bound in honour to keep that secret, but he comforted the princess, drew her to him, and kissed her trembling lips, and then he went away, with a broken heart, leaving, as he thought, a sad heart behind him.

"But he was wrong, and alas! for the constancy of women, the princess forgot the knight, but the knight remembered. And at last when he was free he came back to claim the woman he loved, and found her beyond his reach, the wife of an old and reverend courtier; a woman who lived only for her own pleasure, forgetting the weary heart, the broken life she had left beside the deserted path of her youth and maidenhood.

"I have told you all the story, and I must go now. I've an engagement with Blair."

"No, the story is neither finished nor complete. The engagement will wait; you can break it. I am going to finish the story—and add to it. I shall not call the heroine a princess, for she was not; only a young girl desperately in love. Besides, the princesses in fairy tales are always as good as they are beautiful. I—that is, the girl—was not that. This is my version.

"Once upon a time there lived a girl who had been brought up with high ideals, to believe every knight ready to fight, to live, and to die in the cause of distressed beauty. She had just come from a convent life, just made her first steps in the big, hard world, though then she thought it a loving, kind world. Well, as you said, the girl and the knight met, and although at first she gave him little notice, in time she came to love him as few girls love nowadays, with a love mediæval and heroic in its intensity. She would gladly have died for him, or lived for him, which, she has learned now, is far harder.

"She was one of those who are so trusting—or so foolish—that they would give up the world for love, thinking at the time it an honour well lost. Perhaps the fact that she had in her veins the blood of Southern Italy had something to do with a devotion so un-English. Had the knight said: 'Come with me,' she would have followed him and left everything. But, as you know, he said nothing. He needed no words, for he was a good actor. You need not look grieved; he was an actor. He lured the girl on—but not too far. He was an 'officer and a gentleman,' and he dared not risk his commission by any rashness.

"The girl did not understand this then; she believed the fictions he had made up to deceive her, so she was absurdly happy for a year—desperately happy, as it seems in the light of past events. Then there came a time when the knight went away, two thousand long miles away. Oh! I know he was ordered away; I understand that. It might as well have been to another world. A hundred miles was more than she had ever travelled in her short life.

"Well, the soldier came to her one day when she was alone to take his leave. He expected regret at the parting, but those soft, dark eyes of his looked a skilfully-feigned anguish. The girl waited for him to tell her now that he loved her. But he turned to go, his hand was on the curtain of the door, when the girl called him back.

"It is not a pleasant story to tell, yet I shall take it as my punishment. The knight looked at the girl, saw a face burning with shame and excitement, saw two eyes following all his motions, as if her soul depended upon him. He stood there a little undecided. The girl saw his indecision, and misinterpreted his silence, so she spoke herself. She said that if he went away without her she should kill herself.

"She grovelled at his feet, if not literally, figuratively. She threw herself into his arms—and he held her there. She knew the last happy moments, the last unembittered moments of her pitifully short life as he kissed her hot lips and lied plausibly to her; told her some tale of pledged honour, and secrets that could not be divulged; said that he loved her and only her. Then he put her from him, and went away.

"For a while the girl stood there alone, dazed. Then she realised what she had done. She had rendered in twain the Veil of the Temple, and had shown the Holy of Holies of a woman's heart to sacrilegious eyes. When a woman does that, either the force that rends the veil is something fearful, or there is nothing worth keeping hidden; either her love is overmastering, or there is no love. What that girl suffered in the next hour no man and few women can understand. But from the flame she came forth anew. The love was not burned away, but it had showed her another road, a road where she would find forgetfulness.

"She went into the gay world, the world where they say *on s'amuse*, and if she had not been goaded on by a maddening memory, she would have fallen from sheer weariness. She looked about and saw little that was good, where all before had seemed so pure and bright. In time she was forced—not very unwillingly—into a marriage for position that neither displeased nor pleased her. She grew calmly fond of the old man, her husband, who adored her; but she never told him the story of that year, the shame of which has made her whole life restless.

"When, in after days, the knight came riding back, and believed that he would find the influential wife of an influential man useful—ah, but it is true, and you know it—when he came back he tried to revive her love by a mean pretence. But the girl had become a woman of the world—a woman of no illusions. Once again the Veil of the Temple was rent in twain, this time not to disclose an Ark of burning glory, but an empty Holy of Holies.

"That is all. You may keep your engagement now. I have told you the true story."

N. N.

GOLDEN ✱ STAR.

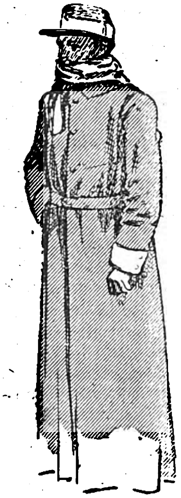
A Romance

BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FIRST VICTORY.



He was disguised enough to pass in the darkness.

ALTHOUGH Hartness was a much taller and broader man than the Spaniard, his long, loose overcoat fitted him well enough for the occasion, and when he had put on his shako, and wrapped his scarf about his neck so as to hide his fair beard, he was disguised enough to pass in the darkness for one of the enemy. We now took the two soldiers who had been with the officer and visited all the posts. We found four of the sentries who could not return the password and were therefore enemies. These we disarmed and bound instead of killing them, for I could see that what I had done had pleased my friend but little, though he saw that in such a desperate venture as ours it was necessary to use desperate measures.

When we had gone the rounds and made sure of all, we buried the two dead bodies, and took our prisoners into one of the caves under the carved stones. Then I posted my men so as to guard all the approaches from the city to the Rodadero, and after that I went with Hartness to the hidden hole by the Sayacusca, and showed him how the way to the Hall of Gold was opened. I did this so that the secret might be in good and safe hands if I should fall in battle, and so that he should be able to properly protect the welfare of Ruth and Golden Star, and fulfil my promises to himself and the Professor.

When I had turned the stone and showed him the chain, I pulled it up and supported it as I had done before, only this time I used the carbine which had belonged to the sentry I had killed, and to the stock of this I fastened a long rope which Tupac had hidden there by my orders. This rope I stretched out along the ground, hiding it as well as I could, in a straight line away from the Sayacusca. The end I led into the entrance of one of the many passages or tunnels which run under the carved stones. By the time I had done this the water had all flowed away, and Hartness said to me:

"Are you going to leave the entrance to your treasure-house open like that for His Excellency to walk into to-morrow?"

"Yes," I said, "but it is only half open. Unless the door below is open too there is no way out or in save this and the channel through which the waters flow, so that His Excellency will not find much down there."

"I see—a trap," he said, "and not one that I should care to see a friend of mine walk into. But you don't mean to drown them all like rats in a hole, do you?"

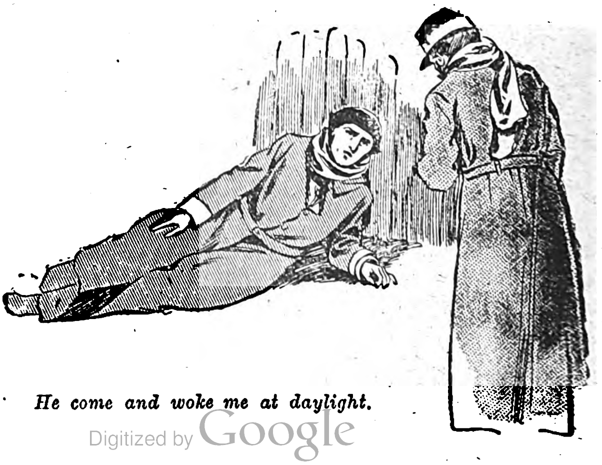
"I cannot tell that yet," I said. "If we can take them alive we may do so, but unless they yield to us they shall yield to the water. Now everything is ready, and we have but to wait. Come and sleep for a little and I will keep watch, and then I will sleep and you shall watch. It will not be daylight for six hours yet, and we can do nothing more till then."

We went to the cavern in which I had hidden the end of the rope, and he lay down on the soft, clean sand, and, soldier-like, was fast asleep almost as soon as he had lain down. I left him there, and made the round of the guards and spoke with the men, telling them as much as it was necessary for them to know of my plans for the next day, and allowed half of them to take two or three hours' rest with their weapons ready at hand while the others watched, and then I went back to Hartness and told him to wake me in three hours, and soon was fast asleep in his place. He came and woke me at daylight and told me that everything was still quiet and that the sentries were all in their places.

Then, when we had breakfasted on the food we had brought with us from the fortress, we called in all the sentries save the two by the Gate of Sand and hid them among the stones and bushes all within an easy rifle-shot of the entrance to the water-cavern. I bade the two I had left by the gate tell the Governor that all was well and, when he had ridden by, to mix with the soldiers and tell them who were for me to separate from the others as soon as they heard my signal cry, and then to wait for the English Captain.

For nearly an hour we sat and watched for the coming of the enemy, and then at last we saw a troop of horse come up out of the valley round the end of the fortress. After them came a group of officers on horseback with the Governor riding at their head, and then another troop of horse, in all about three hundred men. The first troop, led by the Governor and his officers, came on towards the Sayacusca, and the others halted and spread themselves out along the ridge that runs round it. When they saw the empty hole and the steps leading down into the darkness they all crowded round, peering down into it. Then two lanterns were lighted and some of them went down.

They had all dismounted from their horses and were indulging their curiosity without suspicion. I waited till they were nearly all in my trap and then came the moment to close it. My long wailing cry rang out loud and shrill through the hollow and was taken up by my men in hiding, and in an instant all was confusion. I heard my name shouted from one to the other and saw more than half of the troopers in the hollow leave their ranks and gallop away towards the plain. Then I took aim at a trooper who was watching the officers' horses and fired. The bullet struck his horse and it reared up and threw him, and then fell and

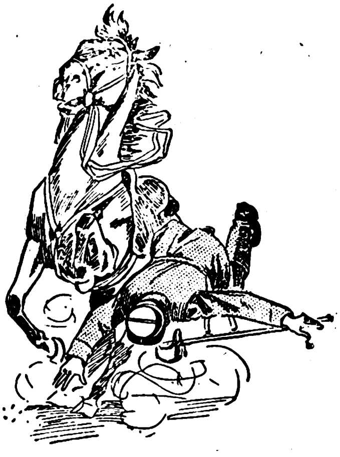


He come and woke me at daylight.

lay kicking on the ground. At this all the others took fright and broke loose and galloped away in all directions. At the same instant the rifles of my men began cracking all round, and saddle after saddle was emptied as the bullets found their mark.

"I'm going to catch one of those horses," said Hartness suddenly to me, "then I'll ride out and bring those other fellows up and show them what to do. That'll be more in my line than this sort of work. Good-bye; you will see or hear of me again before long."

The next moment he was gone, and I had not fired many more shots before I saw him mounted on one of the officers' horses galloping through the hollow towards the ridge. All this time none of my men had shown themselves, and the constant stream of shots coming from all sides of them had thrown the Governor's troops into utter confusion. The officers were shouting orders which no one listened to, the horses were galloping wildly about, rearing and plunging with the pain of their wounds, and many of the soldiers had already taken to flight, believing in their panic that the hollow was full of hidden enemies.



The bullet struck his horse.

We kept up the fire from our hiding-places until we heard shouts and cheers coming from the ridge, and I looked and saw Hartness with a drawn sword in his hand, leading a body of some hundred and fifty troopers down into the hollow.

Now I saw that we should be able to end the battle quickly, so I sent up my signal cry again and called for my own men to come out. Then I pulled the rope and released the chain, and ran out towards my men, shouting to them to close round the entrance to the water-cavern and shoot all who tried to get out. Some three or four sought to escape, and were shot, and then the rest, seeing my men running at them with the bayonet, and the other troopers coming up led by a stranger, lost heart and crowded back into the cleft, firing their revolvers wildly as they went.

The next moment we heard cries of terror coming up out of the darkness, mingled with the rushing of the water, and the Governor, followed by about six of his officers, came leaping up the steps to find a line of bayonets drawn up across the mouth. With the waters surging up behind them and the bayonets in front of them, there was nothing for them but surrender or death.

Hartness, who had now dismounted, ordered the men to fall back a pace, and, as they did so he went through the line with his sword in one hand and a revolver in the other and said to the Governor:

"Señor, will you yield or go back down yonder?"

"We must yield," said the Governor, "since there is no choice. But who are you, and what are you, an Englishman, doing here in arms against the Government?"

"Who I am matters nothing just now," he replied, "and as for your Government it no longer exists. That must be enough for you. Now, señores, give up your swords and revolvers quietly and no harm shall come to you. You, Señor Prada, give your sword to this caballero here who is the Inca Vilcaroya and lawful ruler of this country."

The Governor turned and stared at me, dumb with amazement at these strange words, and all the others stared too, for, like him, they had no doubt heard the legend of my strange fate. He drew his sword and as he did so I covered him with my revolver, and extended my hand to take it. He held the hilt out to me with a trembling hand. I took it in silence, and then I turned from him and said to my men:

"Bring these Spaniards out and bind them safely, then follow me to the Seat of the Incas."

When they saw that the victory was with us, and that the Governor himself was our prisoner, together with many of the chief of his officers, those of the soldiers who had not been for me when they came were glad enough now to secure themselves by shouting my name and obeying my orders, and when I moved away towards the Seat, they followed me, laughing and cheering, well pleased to see their hated masters prisoners in their midst.

The great carved rock which is called the Inca's Seat is, as I have already said, a great rounded mass of rock rising up from the plain of the Rodadero, and carved into many seats. On the top there are three broad seats, the middle one higher than all the rest, and it was here that my forefathers had sat to watch the building of the great fortress, and sometimes to give audience to their people.

Now I sat on it, and the soldiers drew themselves up round the rock, with the prisoners in the midst of them, and I spoke to them, and told them freely of the strange things that had happened to me, and how I had come back to the Land of the Four Regions to drive out their oppressors and restore the just and gentle rule of my ancestors. Then I had the Governor brought up and stood before me and bade Francis Hartness come and sit on my right hand and speak to him for me, and by his lips I told him that unless the city was surrendered to me before evening he and all his officers should die and all the houses of the Spaniards in the city should be given to the flames and no pity shown to any man, woman, or child of them, for as they had treated my people so I had sworn to treat them unless they yielded.

You may think how troubled he was at hearing such words as these, since he knew from what he had seen that there was conspiracy and treachery among his own men, and he had no knowledge of how far this had gone or which of his men he could trust, and so this man, who but a few hours before had been master of the whole valley and had looked upon the Indios, as he called them, as little better than slaves, now answered me humbly enough and prayed me not to murder him when he was helpless in my power. And to this I answered him that the blood of my people had been crying out for many generations against his people, and that this was the day not of mercy but of vengeance, and that I would do as I had said unless the city were delivered to me.

Then I descended from the seat and mounted the Governor's horse, and, after I had sent a company of twelve men to ride quickly down to the city and then to ride through all the streets, shouting my name as a signal to tell the Indians that all was well, and that the moment for them to rise against their oppressors had come, I took my place beside Hartness at the head of our little army, and with our prisoners well guarded close behind us we set out on our way back to Cuzco.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FIGHT FOR THE CITY.

As we approached the city we heard the sound of the church bells being rung wildly, and looking down, we could see the streets and squares full of people, and as we got nearer still we heard the cracking of rifles and the shouts and cries of men in conflict.

"There is either a fight or a riot going on down there," said Hartness to me, "and if many of the soldiers remain faithful to the Government there'll be some bloodshed before to-night. Have you any idea how many there are?"

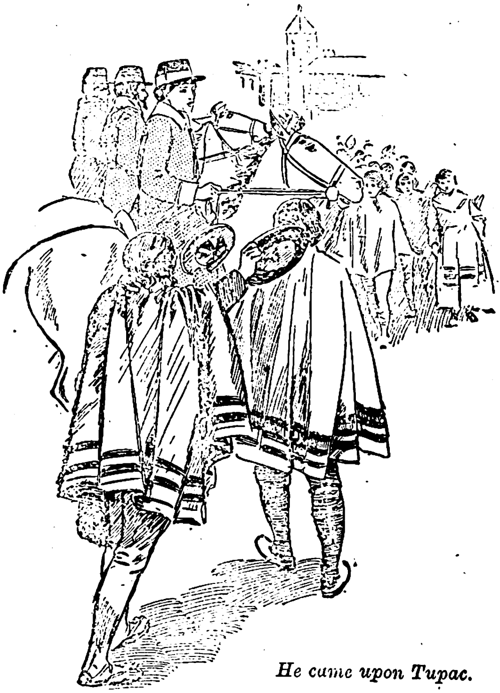
"There were more than two thousand soldiers in the city yesterday," I said; "and out of these more than half have already taken my gold and sworn faith to me. Of the rest many are wavering, and when they see that we have taken the Governor prisoner I think they will come over."

"Very likely," he said, "but how about those machine guns in the barracks? There are three Gatlings and two Maxims, and if they keep those and work them properly they'll just sweep the streets and squares clear, you know."

"I have promised fifty pounds weight of gold for each of them," I said; "and, more than that, there should be no ammunition for them by this time if what the sentries told us is true."

"Yes," he said, "if we can get hold of that or even the best part of it I don't think there will be much danger. However, as everything depends on that I think we had better go straight to the Cuartel first. If we have that we have Cuzco."

We entered the city by the street of El Triunfo and made our way straight to the great Plaza. As we rode along three abreast we were greeted by joyful cries from the crowds of Indians who parted to leave a way for us through the midst of them. Tupac and his comrades had done their work well, and all night the people had been thronging into the city from the surrounding country. All the shops and the houses of the Spaniards were already shut up, for although none knew the truth of what was happening, all thought that the revolution had already broken out in Cuzco and so had made themselves as safe as they could.



He came upon Tupac.

A little way from the entrance to the great square we came upon Tupac at the head of some two hundred of the men of San Sebastian, armed with knives and guns and pistols of all sorts which they had taken during the night from the towns and villages around where they had been doing the work I had bidden them do. He told me that there were more than a thousand soldiers in the city waiting only for me to show myself to kill their officers and come over to us, and that the others would fight without heart, if they fought at all, now that the Governor was taken—for half of the people of Cuzco were for the Government and half for the revolution, and so the city would be divided against itself and all would be confusion as soon as the fighting began.

He also told me that the official who is called the Sub-Prefect had brought out two of the machine guns and had planted them at each end of the terrace in front of the cathedral and made a proclamation that unless everyone left the streets within an hour he would have them cleared with bullets.

When I told this to Hartness he said:

"Then we must have those two guns first. Tell Tupac to break his men up into little bands of about half-a-dozen each and send them round into all the streets leading to the square and tell everyone that isn't armed to keep out of the way if they don't want to get hurt. Then you ride on with the prisoners and a guard of fifty men, and let them be ready to shoot sharply. Tell them to aim at the knees and not to empty their magazines too fast. I'll look after the guns. They won't fire on you for fear of killing the Governor and the rest. Now, forward!"

I did as he said. Tupac's men broke up and disappeared as though by magic. I took the reins of the horse on which the Governor was bound and bade half-a-dozen of my men to do the same with the others. Then two and two we trotted into the square, Tupac running along by my horse's head. It was covered with groups of people all talking and looking and pointing about them, and on the terrace before the cathedral there were two companies of soldiers, one at each end, drawn up behind a machine gun. As soon as the people saw me ride in with the Governor bound beside me a great shout went up and many came running towards me, but I waved them back and shouted to them to leave the square and guard all the streets leading into it. I did this so that those who understood me and were therefore friends, might escape out of harm's way before the guns began to fire.

Then I drew my revolver and put it to the Governor's head and bade Tupac tell him to order the men away from the guns, and that if a shot was fired he should be the first to die.

So, as there was no help for it, he did so, and called to the officers to come down and speak with him, but insfead of obeying they shouted some orders to their men and I saw them making ready to fire the guns, for, as we found out afterwards, they were men who would have joined the revolution when it broke out.

But before the guns could be trained on us Hartness's troop swung round into the square. The twenty foot soldiers sent a volley along the terrace, firing low as he had told them, and killing and wounding nearly half of the men at the guns. Then there came a rattling volley from the cavalry and another from my own men, and then, with a great shout and a clattering of hoofs, Hartness leapt his horse up the steps at the end of the terrace, where the street slopes up nearly level with it at the back by the cathedral, and charged down on the rear of the enemy just as the gun was swung round.

As he did this I led my men round to the other end of the terrace, where I saw that the men had begun fighting among themselves, and thus I knew that some of them were our friends and were seeking to prevent the others from training the gun on us. I halted, and ordered thirty of my men to dismount and take the gun, which they did with very little trouble, for the others, seeing how hopelessly they were outnumbered, either threw down their arms and ran away, or surrendered. Two of the officers were killed and another one taken prisoner.

Meanwhile Hartness had cleared the other end of the terrace, and taken the other gun after killing nearly every man who had defended it. But scarcely had this been done than we heard the rattle of drums and the sound of bugles, and saw two columns of men marching at the double into the Plaza, one from the street leading from the Plaza Del Cabillo, where the barracks are, and the other past the Church of the Jesuits, which was at the other end of the square.

"Are those friends or enemies, or both?" Hartness asked me, when he had ordered the two guns to be trained one on each of the columns, and sat down behind one of them himself.

"If there are friends among them," I said, "they know what to do, and when they have done it you can fire."

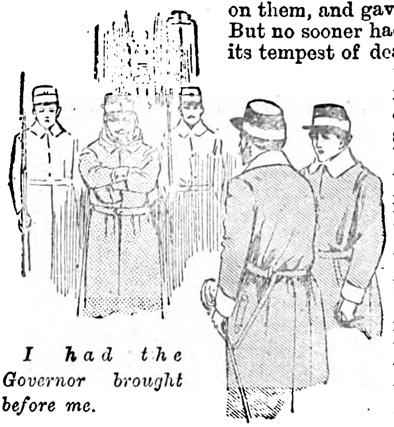
Even as I spoke the two columns seemed to break up. Scores of men broke out of the ranks, shouting my name and cheering, and these all ran together towards the fountain in the middle of the square. The rest stopped in wonder and confusion, their officers shouting furiously at them, and ordering them to fire on the deserters. Some obeyed, others, when they saw the guns trained on them, ran away and hid themselves in doorways, and then Hartness gave the order to fire.

Instantly every other sound was drowned by the terrible voices of the machine guns. Hartness glanced once along the barrel of his, and then sent a torrent of bullets full into the middle of the broken column that had come down from the Plaza Del Cabillo. Then he moved it a little from side to side, and then stopped. When the smoke had drifted away I saw that there was not a living being in the corner of the square, only huddled heaps of corpses and bodies of animals. Then he turned the gun on the other corner into which the other gun was firing, and soon not a man or an animal was left alive there also.

When the firing ceased there were none left in the square but those who had declared for us. Hartness immediately formed these into two columns. He led one of them with one gun at the head into the street past the Church of the Jesuits, and I led the other with the second gun into the other street leading to the Cuartel, and up these two streets we fought our way into the Plaza Del Cabillo in which we could hear more fighting already going on.

When we at last gained the square we found a furious fight going on in front of the Cuartel between one body of men who were defending the building and another that was attacking it, but which of these were friends or foes we did not know until Tupac, heedless of the flying bullets, ran out shouting in Quichua that Vilcaroya had come. Shouts and cheers from the Cuartel soon told us that our friends had got possession of it, and when the fight was over I learnt that when the two columns had started, leaving a third drawn up in the square before the Cuartel, those who were for us, remembering what I had said about the gold that I would give for the machine guns and the ammunition, had broken their ranks and made a rush for the doors to secure the three guns which were in the courtyard, and so the fight had begun, they seeking to hold the Cuartel against the others until help came.

As soon as I knew which were our enemies, and their bullets came singing about our ears, I had the gun trained on them, and gave the word to fire. But no sooner had it begun to rain its tempest of death than we heard the other one speak from the other end of the square, and such a storm of bullets swept across the Plaza that before many moments had passed there was not a man or beast left alive in it.

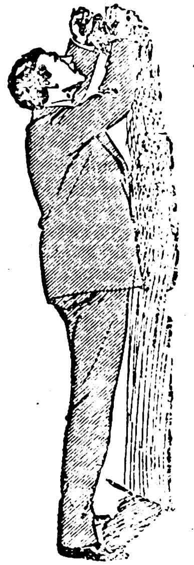


I had the Governor brought before me.

Then, when the firing ceased again, those who had held the Cuartel and had taken shelter in it as soon as the machine guns began to play, threw open the doors to us and came out to welcome us, and Francis Hartness and I clasped hands as victors, and, for the time being at least, masters of the ancient City of the Sun, for with the Cuartel we had taken all the arms and ammunition stored up in Cuzco, including the three Gatling guns and the two Maxims, and, more than this, the whole of the native population of the valley was in our favour.

The fighting was now over save for conflicts that were going on in different parts of the city between the Spaniards and the Indians, and I at once had the Governor brought before me in the Cuartel and told him through Hartness to write a proclamation surrendering the city to us and ordering all the officials to come in and make their submission before sundown, threatening fire and sack to every Spanish house if it was not done. This he did, knowing well what would befal him if he refused. At the same time Hartness made a proclamation in my name in English and Spanish promising perfect freedom and security to all foreign merchants in the region that was under our command.

It was then about midday, and when I had given Francis Hartness full authority to act in my name as Governor of the city, which, speaking fluent Spanish, he could do better than I, I took a guard of fifty men and went with Tupac back to the Rodadero, and took ten of the men into the Hall of Gold and bade them carry out as much as they could, so that I might keep my promise to the soldiers who had been faithful to me, and while they were doing this I went with Tupac to Djama's cell and found him wailing and crying like a little child, and beating his hands on the golden wall of his prison and praying most piteously for a sight of the daylight and a breath of the fresh air of heaven.



Beating his hands on the golden wall of his prison.

The Spaniard when he heard us coming began to shriek and scream, and I bade Tupac tell him that I would gag him for a day and a night if he did not cease his cries. But to Djama I told what had happened, and how Cuzco was already mine, and promised that I would let him out for a little the next day if he would keep silence for half an hour, and, hearing this, he ceased his cries, and I went on to the throne-room to take the news of our victory to Ruth and Golden Star.

(*To be concluded.*)

IN the next number but one of SHORT STORIES, which will be on sale in Christmas week, there will appear the first instalment of a delightful serial by

E. C. WAGGENER, entitled

"The Wrong that was Done."

This story, and in fact the whole number, will be profusely illustrated. We have commissioned several well-known authors to write specially seasonable stories for this issue, and if there be any of your friends who are not already regular subscribers to SHORT STORIES, this will be a splendid opportunity for them to mend their ways.

A PROMISE UNDER PRESSURE.

THE Comtesse de Moncley—who will soon change her name, as you shall see—is one of the most delicious widows imaginable, and also one of the cleverest I have ever met. From the very first day she knew precisely how to avoid any exaggeration that could be considered bad taste in the expression of her sorrow, without falling into the other extreme, and making those who saw her in her widow's weeds think she must wear red satin under her crape.

Early in April she had quietly left her Paris apartment, where no male visitors had set foot since her husband's death, and it was only by accident that, a week later, I discovered the address she had so carefully concealed from everyone. It was "Sycamore Villa, Chantilly." On the first of May there might have been seen to arrive at a little bit of a house, situated at a convenient distance from Sycamore Villa, several trunks, an English cart and pony, a saddle-horse, a bull-terrier, two servants, and a man bordering on thirty. That man was myself.

I hasten to add that in this circumstance I acted solely at my own risk and peril, without any authorisation, any right whatever, and with no other notice than my love—my profound love—to prompt me to hope that my change of domicile would not be a dead loss. Ah, well—nothing venture, nothing win. And what did I venture? The Salon, the May *fêtes*, the Grand Prix, the mob in the Allée des Poteaux, a few balls—what were they in comparison with the charms of a most attractive neighbourhood? I have known men to cross the seas and spend fortunes to follow to the ends of the world an adventuress, whose whole body was not worth the tip of Mme. de Moncley's little finger.

Clarisse's pretty anger when I presented myself at her house on the day of arrival was my first delightful recompense. In spite of her grand air I saw that she was touched, and I doubt if ever lover experienced so much pleasure in being shown the door by a pretty woman. She took her time about it, too, and only pushed me into the street after a regulation lecture, to which I listened very humbly, replying only so much as was necessary to lengthen it, which concluded in these words:

"And now you will do me the favour to return to Paris. The train leaves in an hour."

"An hour!" I objected timidly. "That is hardly time to ship two horses and a carriage, and throw up a lease——"

"What is this?" she cried. "A lease! You have presumed to—go, sir! What audacity! A lease! And, if you please, where is your house?"

"A long way from here," I hastened to reply. "At the other end of the forest. I am sure it must have taken me fully three-quarters of an hour to come here."

To be precise it had taken me about five minutes.

"To think," she exclaimed, "what a poor woman deprived of her protector is exposed to! You would not have dared to do this if my husband were still alive! And to think that he considered you his best friend! Poor Charles!"

"He has never had any cause to complain," I murmured. "Let us talk together of him."

"Never!"

"Then let us talk of ourselves; that will be better still."

This suggestion shocked her so that it took me a long time to calm her. Finally, she did not wish to let me go until I had sworn never to set foot in her house again. It is needless to say that it took half an hour to persuade me to make this promise, which I broke the next morning and as often as possible.

I pass over the months that followed, merely declaring that in this vale of tears there is no more happy lot than that of such an unhappy lover as I was. Clarisse had the most adorable way of annihilating me with a look from her blue eyes—eyes that were intended for quite another purpose than annihilating—whenever she saw that I was going to fall on my knees before her, and I must confess she saw it at least ten times during every visit I made her; still, in despite of her express prohibition, and when I so far forgot myself as to tell her that, if the intent were as good as the deed, the late lamented ought to have a heavy grudge against "his best friend," seeing that I loved his wife madly from the very first.

"Not another word," she would say severely; "you blaspheme against friendship. Poor Charles!"

And her white, dimpled hand would pitilessly stop my mouth, so that, if I had followed my inclination, I would have blasphemed from morning till night like the worst traitor to friendship in the world.

The day she left off crape I profited by the occasion—naturally enough, it seems to me—to propose myself in set terms as a candidate to succeed poor Charles. That evening—it was a June evening, and the acacias made the most of the power which certain vegetables possess of intoxicating one with their perfume—that evening her hand did not stop my mouth at all, it reached for the bell. Clarisse did not threaten this time; she acted. I saw that I was on the point of being put out by her servants—who consisted of an old woman who had been her nurse and whom I could have bowled over with a breath. However, it was no time for airy persiflage. Without waiting for Nancy to seize me by the coat, I took my hat and fled.

When day broke I had not closed my eyes; not that the situation seemed desperate, for I had learned to read Clarisse's eyes. But all night long I had repeated over and over again to myself:

"Heaven grant that the little house in the Avenue Friedland is still for sale. We could be so comfortable there."

In spite of this I was no further advanced when September came, the last month of my lease. I was no longer shown the door when I suggested my candidature, but Clarisse assumed a bored air and calmly talked of something else. Between ourselves, I would rather she rang the bell, for I divined that she was thinking:

"My dear friend, you do not displease me; quite the contrary. But you must confess that, in the solitude of Chantilly, I have scarcely had opportunity of enjoying my widowhood. Let me see if it is really worthy of its reputation. In a year or two we can talk of your affairs."

In a year or two! Pretty and charming as she was, Clarisse would have a score of admirers round her, and adorers round the woman one wants to marry are like flies in milk; they may do no great harm, but they certainly do not improve the milk.

Early in September, Mme. de Moncley informed me one day that she was going to Paris on the morrow to have a look at her apartments.

"I sincerely hope," she added, in a severe tone, "that you do not think of accompanying me."

"How can you suggest such a thing?" said I, with apparent submission. "You leave at——"

"At eight in the evening, as I do not wish to be seen. I shall send Nancy in the afternoon to prepare my room. Ah. poor Paris!"

She no longer said "Poor Charles." I admit that this "Poor Paris!" made me much more uneasy.

The following evening, at eight o'clock, the doors of the express train, which stops hardly a minute, were already closed. Clarisse had not appeared. She reached the station just as the bell rang.

"Quick! Hurry up, madam," cried the railway official.

"Hurry," I repeated, opening a compartment at random and helping her in.

But instead of getting in, she fell back, almost fainting in my arms. This is what she had seen, and what I, too, had seen over her shoulder:

The seats of the compartment were unoccupied, and three men, perched like monkeys on the back of the seats, held to their shoulders three guns, whereof the barrels shone in the lamp-light like cannons. One of them, as we opened the door, had shouted in a terrible voice: "Don't come in for——"

I had closed the door so quickly that we had not heard the end of the sentence. Then Clarisse and I bundled ourselves into the next compartment without quite knowing what we were doing. The train was already on its way. We were alone. Mme. de Moncley seemed half dead with fear, and I must confess I was violently shaken.

"Did you see them?" she cried. "What can be happening in that compartment? They are going to fight—to kill each other! What terrible tragedy is to be enacted right beside us?"

"I don't understand it at all," I replied. "Only one explanation seems possible to me. They are hunters who have suddenly gone crazy. Otherwise why should they climb upon the seats? If they simply wanted to kill each other, they could do it without all that performance."

"No," suggested Clarisse. "It is some dreadful foreign kind of duel. In such cases they do sometimes climb up anything they can find. But why didn't they stop them at Chantilly?"

"The train itself scarcely stopped there."

"Did you hear how they called out: 'Don't come in'? The wretches, they don't want to be disturbed while they are killing themselves. Goodness! Just listen!"

The fusillade had commenced in earnest. Several gun-shots had sounded, dominated by a shrill, piercing cry, which still rings in my ears. Then a deathly silence ensued; they were all dead, however bad shots they might have been.

Though we were travelling at a rate of over forty miles an hour at the time, I made ready to get out upon the step and find out what was going on in our neighbours' compartment. As I lowered the window two arms seized me, and a voice, broken with anguish—but which sounded very sweet all the same—gasped behind me:

"Philip, if you love me, do not go! They will kill you!"

It was precisely like the fourth act of *The Hugenots* except that my name is not Raoul.

I saw the advantage of my situation, and I resolved to profit by it. I profited by it so well that, after a dialogue too intimate to be repeated here, I was in a position to sing—if I had had a voice, which I haven't—"Thou-ou ha-st said it."

For she had said it. Poor Charles was distanced now. She had said the sweet words: "I love you."

A prey to emotions bordering on the hysterical, Clarisse sobbed and clung to me with all her strength, though I had not the faintest desire to intrude on the massacre next door. They could kill themselves at their ease. Let every man attend to his own affairs. As for me, I was very much occupied just then.

That is why, early the next morning, I hurried to my lawyer to speak to him about the little house in the Avenue Friedland, which was still for sale, but, thank Fortune, is no longer in the market. Decorators and furnishers are at work in it, and when January comes you will see it occupied by a certain young couple that I know of.

But let us not anticipate. When the train pulled up at the station, my companion and I had quite forgotten our neighbours—or what was left of them; but now the authorities must be informed and the bodies removed. I had jumped out and was going to look about for a *sergeant de ville*, when I beheld the door of the compartment open and the three hunters calmly descend from it, carrying, rolled up in a rug, an inert mass which looked as if it might be the body of a young child. Without an instant's hesitation, I seized one of the assassins by the collar.

"Scoundrel!" I cried. "What have you got in that rug?"

"Don't make such a row," he replied, "or we'll have a hundred people round us. It is only my poor dog."

"Dog!" I repeated, indignant at the man's coolness. "Come, come, you cannot deceive me, I saw it all."

My captive, whom I still held by the collar, opened a corner of the rug and showed me a setter's muzzle, with flecks of foam on it dappled with blood. I dropped my hold on the man's collar in the greatest confusion.

"Really, I scarcely know how to apologise," I said. "But, frankly, it is not astonishing that I should have been deceived—three men crouching on the seats of the carriage and shooting——"

"Still, the explanation is very simple. My dog was bitten three weeks ago. I had the wound cauterised, and thought the animal was saved. We have been hunting all day near Creil, but no sooner were we in the train than hydrophobia developed and the dog began to snap at us. To attempt to put the beast out was to court death, and there was nothing for it but for us to climb up on the seats and shoot the dog. We were not able to do so until after we had left Chantilly, for the poor brute had taken refuge under the seat. Finally, by calling it, I persuaded it to put its head out, and then we shot it. I tell you, it's a trip I shall not soon forget."

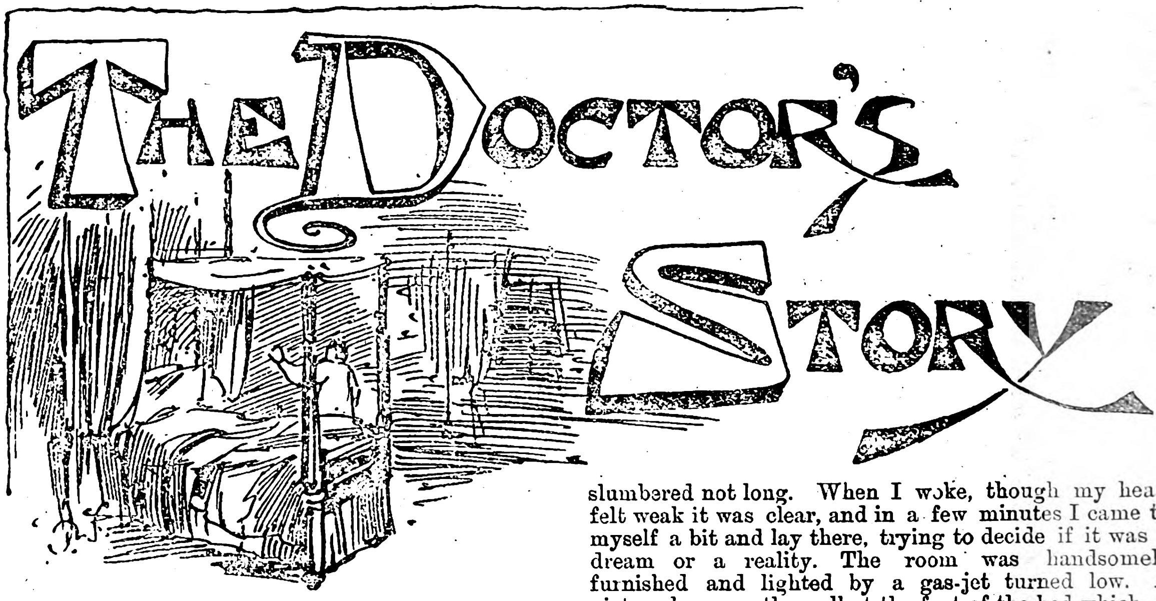
"Neither shall I," I replied, and I rejoined Clarisse, who was waiting for me at a little distance, and whose curiosity was vastly excited at seeing me thus politely take leave of the assassins.

"Well, then," she said, making a little face when I h told her the story, "that doesn't count. I take back what I said."

But at the same time she softly squeezed my arm with her own, and I saw in her eyes that "that" did "count."

Le Vier.

THE DOCTOR'S STORY



This is the story the doctor told me as we sat smoking in the garden after dinner, one soft, warm, evening in summer: "When I left college, I was sent to Paris to finish my medical education. It was during my wild oat period, I am sorry to have to confess, when one night I paid my first visit to a gambling house—and the last, for the experience I had taught me a much-needed lesson, and satisfied my curiosity for ever in that line.

"The house into which I was introduced by a supposed friend was gorgeously arrayed, and a great game of *rouge-et-noir* was going on—a game of which I knew absolutely nothing. But with a young man's conceit, increased by the wine that flowed freely, I found a place at the table, and, instructed by my companion, commenced betting. With a greenhorn's luck I kept winning and doubling the stakes, in spite of my guide's advice to retire with what I had before my good fortune changed.

"Soon the other players withdrew from the game, leaving me alone against the bank. The play had become intensely exciting, and I was the centre of all eyes. I had offended my companion by refusing his advice to stop, so he no longer would speak to me on friendly terms, for which I neither cared nor thought. A great pile of gold lay before me on the table, staked against the bank's for the next deciding throw. If I won, the bank was broken. With my fool's luck I did win.

"The game was over, and my pockets bulged with their load of yellow French coins, swept into them without counting. Then more wine from the polite and smiling keeper and my head swam, and things danced confusedly round me. I remember someone offering to help me and saying I shouldn't risk being murdered and robbed by going home, and telling me that I should have a bed in that house, where I could sleep off my wine and excitement and be perfectly safe until daylight.

"I remember shaking his hand and vowing eternal friendship, and going with him to a room upstairs and getting into bed and hearing him softly close the door and leave me. I must have fallen asleep immediately and slumbered not long. When I woke, though my head felt weak it was clear, and in a few minutes I came to myself a bit and lay there, trying to decide if it was a dream or a reality. The room was handsomely furnished and lighted by a gas-jet turned low. A picture hung on the wall at the foot of the bed which, I began to notice, had four high posts reaching to the ceiling, and holding a canopy extending over the whole with short curtains at the sides.

"The picture, which I was watching listlessly, was the figure of an old soldier standing grimly, straight and stern, gazing at me. After a time I got tired of the old fellow and shut my eyes. When I opened them again after some minutes, my grim sentinel's hat had disappeared. That seemed strange, and I closed my eyes again, and the old chap's head was gone.

"I lay puzzling over the affair and wondering if my head was to be depended on yet, until, to make sure, I stepped from the bed to the floor. The first thing that struck me was that the canopy top of my bed looked queer. It seemed lower, and the four posts holding it seemed to have pierced through its corners and into the ceiling above. While I was trying to understand I saw between the canopy and the ceiling a glistening iron rod, apparently grooved like an immense screw, and twisting so noiselessly and slowly that its motion was almost imperceptible.

"At once it flashed on me that I was in peril of some kind, and though very startled I managed to avoid making a noise, while I tried to comprehend what devilry was going on.

"Soon I saw through it all. The canopy was bogus—merely hiding a soft mattress or something, which was being forced gradually down by the screw worked from the room above, and was intended to catch and smother whoever was in the bed, after winning the gamblers' gold and being drugged with their wine like myself. Judging from the movements the screw was making, I calculated a half-hour must intervene ere my murderers would pay me a visit—providing I didn't precipitate an attack sooner by alarming them.

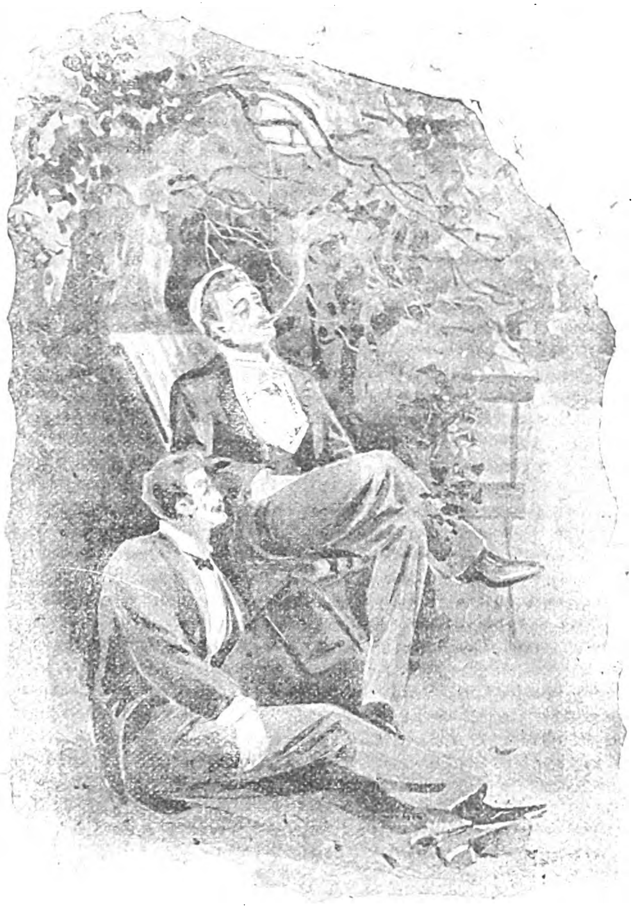
"Without a sound I got a window open and gazed out in the darkness. The wind was blowing and rattling the shutters, and might prevent the noise of an escape being heard in case one was possible. Thick clouds were flying over the sky, obscuring the moon just rising. I could see that my room was in the back of the house, just below the attic, and that I looked out on a yard bounded by a wall too high to scale, and no doubt made so purposely.

"Beneath me on the first floor a window shot forth bright streams of light illuminating the ground where I should have to drop. Every now and then moving shadows showed plainly that inside that window were my watchers, waiting to dispose of my corpse as soon as they had carried out their murderous intentions.

"The house stood by itself, otherwise I might have been able to climb into the next, as I had seen firemen do with a ladder. That gave me an idea. If I could rig a ladder of that kind I might reach the roof, cross it and escape by climbing down the water-pipe in front to the street, which probably I should be able to do, thanks to my athletic training at Oxford.

"How quickly a person's wit will act sometimes when death seems near! I looked about the room for material to make the scaling ladder, which seemed my only hope. Two bed slats I found under my mattress luckily. The wire by which were suspended the old soldier's picture and others on the wall bound them securely together. I had a knife which contained a screw-driver. In the cupboard were large strong hooks. Quickly I unscrewed four and put them upside down on my slats. Half-a-dozen chair rungs, which I pulled off the chairs, bound at proper distances on the slats with the picture wire, made my scaling ladder complete, and I thought strong enough to support my weight. If it was not, I should be killed, anyway.

"I looked at my bed. The canopy was three-quarters of the way down. I had no time to lose. Taking the gold, which had been tied lightly in my handkerchief and placed under my pillow by my host, I fastened it about my waist, and in stockinged feet went to the window with my ladder. Peering above I could see the gutter's edge, and, raising the ladder, found it reached, and managed to hook it fast. Then I got out on the window-sill and prepared to mount.



As we sat smoking in the garden after dinner.

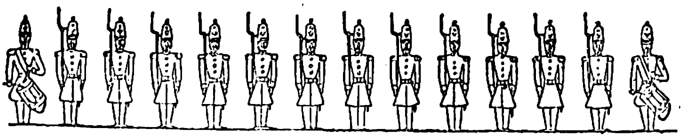
"Trying it carefully with my weight, which made it swing inward against the house, thereby holding better, I nerved myself, and stepping from the sill began my perilous ascent. Half way up I thought of the window of the room where the machinery for my suffocation was being worked—but it was too late to retreat, and I must take the chance of not being detected by the worker.

When my head came above the gutter I saw a light inside that room, but the curtain was fortunately drawn over the glass. With trembling arms I raised myself on the ledge, and, quietly pulling the ladder after me, crawled along to the corner of the house. As I expected, the roof had the gutter's ledge all round it, but before I could turn its corner my escape was discovered, and I heard low voices, evidently proceeding from the window out of which I had just climbed. In another moment men with lanterns and a fierce dog were searching the yard, thinking, of course, that I must be in it.

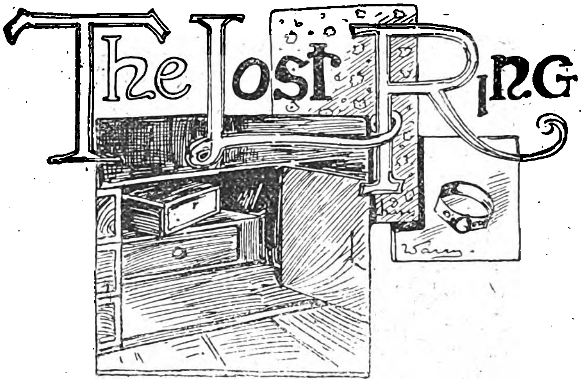
"Not daring to move, and fearing that the bright moon, then breaking through a rift in the clouds, would expose me to the fellows below, I flattened myself against the roof's edge and waited. Then the moon burst forth, shining directly where I hid, and I saw or felt that the searchers had found me, for, leaving the yard, they re-entered the house, and I could hear them calling to the worker in the attic behind me. Like a snake, but quicker, I squirmed round the house corner to its front, found the water-pipe, and, grasping it, let myself over and slid to the street just as the front attic window opened and a head came forth.

"When I stopped running I was far away and safe with my hard-earned gold, though only half dressed; but I found a little inn where the people were honest, and there rested until daybreak among a lot of early-rising market folks, who were too polite to ask questions."

W. T.



The Lost Ring



CHAPTER I.

That a ring laid loosely in a drawer, or left among the miscellaneous orders of a dressing-table, should disappear, is not surprising. Gaping dovetails, pilfering maidservants—even that born thief, the magpie—have then to be taken into account. But when a ring has been secured in a jewel case, that case locked into a general cabinet, and the keys carried upon the person, one expects to find the article when wanted. Yet from this double, treble security, the ring had disappeared—vanished into thin air. I stood as one dumfounded, holding the jewel-case in my hand.

The intrinsic value of the lost ring was great; but that was the merest *bagatelle* in my eyes compared with its interest. The ring had a history. It was at once a pledge and a reward. It had been given to my father, while a trader in Russia, by the Tsarewitch, the Grand Duke Alexander, as a reward for an important personal service; and with it had been given the pledge that never would it be presented by father or son without obtaining for the bearer an imperial audience and gracious hearing.

My father, a proud and independent man at heart, had made much of the gift and little of the promise; and when he willed over the article to me, his eldest son, some time before his death, he smiled at the idea that the Tsarewitch's pledge should ever be redeemed. I had treasured the ring with loving care, deeming it the most precious *souvenir* of my lost parent that I possessed. Never could I look upon it without recalling his eventful career and unique character.

And it was this much treasured *souvenir* that had so mysteriously vanished. The shock of surprise and annoyance that went through me was, I think, accounted for. Not so, however, the strange and instinctive feeling of terror that followed. Looking at the empty jewel-case, I was seized with a fit of horror perfectly unaccountable. My brain reeled, a wave of darkness rushed before my eyes, my knees shook as if about to fail me. When the first spasm passed I sickened; and not till some minutes after I had recourse to the water-jug did I recover, in a measure, my normal powers.

I may here admit that I am of a constitution extremely nervous; and have been all my life susceptible to influences which do not affect, or affect very slightly, my more phlegmatic friends. But an attack such as that I have now described I had never before undergone. Such sensations of deep, of soul-harrowing despair had hitherto been foreign to my experience.

I was unmarried at the time I speak of, and lived in London. My house—I had an antipathy to chambers—was superintended by a housekeeper of mature years. For this woman I rang when I had a little recovered, and impatiently awaited her coming.

Presently she entered, with an excuse on her lips for her tardiness. Her rheumatic spasms, she said, were unusually severe that evening. My housekeeper, I may say, was not a pleasant person to look at, her long nose and heavy eyebrows being her most striking features. Her expression was very difficult to read, from the unpleasant shade under which her eyes resided, and the immobility of the muscles of the mouth. But as far as I could make out, it was not very conciliating.

"Mrs. Benson," I said, with a severity of manner unusual with me, "something very serious has occurred."

"Indeed, sir? I am sorry, Mr. Glapthorne."

The words were uttered rather than expressed. Indeed, it was a characteristic of my housekeeper's tones, as it was of her face, to convey very little.

"A valuable ring has disappeared—disappeared in a manner unaccountable, except on the supposition that some untrustworthy person has access to my keys—or at least to this room. Do you know of any such person, Mrs. Benson?"

My housekeeper replied that only the maid and herself had admittance to that bedroom.

The maid—a bungling country lass—I instantly acquitted of suspicion. As for Mrs. Benson, it seemed ridiculous to suspect her, for not to speak of her severity of character, and the unexceptionable nature of the testimonials she had brought with her, the whole house, with articles of much greater value than the ring, was daily in her power. Yet this theft, so daring, so inexplicable!

"I suppose it would be impossible for anyone to enter the room without the knowledge of the maid or you?"

Mrs. Benson replied in her usual stony manner that such an event would be highly improbable, if not quite impossible.

"Then I am to suppose this solid hoop of gold has been spirited away by pixies or fairies, or something of that sort?" I said, with not unreasonable irritation.

My housekeeper remarked that she had heard of sleep-walkers and others exceptionally constituted unconsciously stealing their own property. On which I lost my temper, and gave Mrs. Benson leave to quit the room.

"You may go," I said angrily, "I shall have this mystery immediately sifted."

She received this implied threat as stonily as she had a day or two before received my compliments on her careful management.

As she turned to go, a confused noise of voices in the street induced me to throw up the window.

There was a crowd and commotion without, but above all the shrill voices of the newsboys came plaintively into the room.

Was it possible I heard aright?

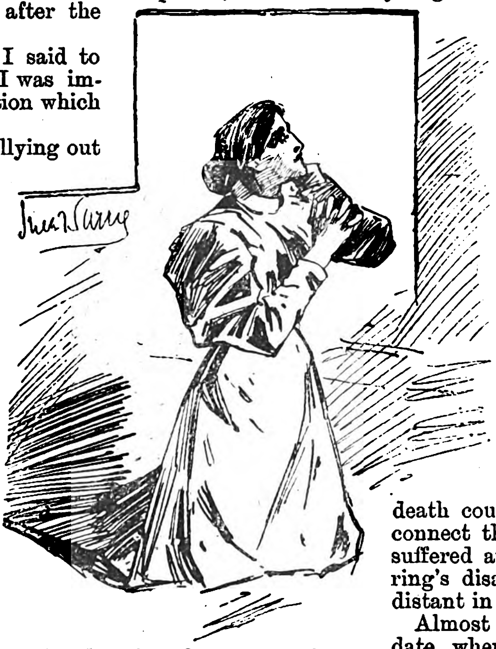
"Assassination of the Tsar! Fearful details!"

Once again the fearful and undefined terror seized me. Once more my sensations were those of anguish and indescribable despair. But the night air blew in my face, and I saved myself from fainting. I staggered back into the room.

CHAPTER II.

In such a condition as I have indicated but vainly would attempt to describe, a man's feelings must be peculiarly susceptible to impression by strange and uncommon incidents. Solely to my condition, then, do I ascribe the trepidation with which, on turning from the window, I viewed my housekeeper on her knees in an attitude of ecstatic devotion. Her face seemed transfigured—transformed. The expression, no longer undecided, was one of fierce and exulting triumph, while the kneeling limbs, the clasped hands, the moving lips, conveyed the idea of a thanksgiving prayer. Almost before I could form these ideas she ceased her muttering, rose to her feet, and, subsiding into her old sphinx-like self, quietly quitted the room.

I was dumb with amazement. The events of the evening had been so *bizarre*, so sudden, and if I did not strangely mistake, so marvellously linked together, that I seemed to move in a mist. The unaccountable disappearance of the Tsarewitch's ring, the news of the Tsar's murder, and the fanatical conduct of my housekeeper on hearing of the latter occurrence were facts which connected themselves inseparably in my brain. That I attached a ridiculous importance to Mrs. Benson's conduct, will, no doubt, be the reader's opinion, as it was my own, half-an-hour after the event.



I viewed my housekeeper on her knees.

"The old crone grows mad!" I said to myself, feeling all the time that I was imposing on my reason an explanation which it refused to accept.

Finally I put on my hat, and sallying out into the street procured a copy of a newspaper containing the news of the Tsar's assassination. The "fearful details" of the headlines were brief but terrible. There could be no doubt that the giver of the lost ring would soon be autocrat of the Russians.

So strangely do our petty personal interests outweigh at times our humanity, that the loss of the golden hoop was a much more important matter to me that evening than all the sufferings of my exalted fellow-man, the Tsar.

Thus it was, that with the newspaper in my hand containing the painful news, I recollected that I had an acquaintance near by with a *penchant* for the unthankful labours of a detective. Nor was his a futile ambition. Indeed, of all the men of my acquaintance could I least associate Paul Gaston with futility.

He was thorough and uncompromising in all his doings. Of French blood, a thorough sceptic, with a mind ever on its logical hinges, Gaston tolerated ignorance but abhorred mysticism. Withal, he was no slavish drudge of facts, but could theorise as boldly as the most unpractical philosopher. Still, in spite of its many gifts, Gaston's mind must have had a severe twist before crime, with its petty accessories and details, could have acquired such a fascination for him. I smiled on recollecting the enthusiasm with which my friend, on every possible occasion, was wont to assume his *rôle* of detective, and how he gloried in recounting his frequent successes.

To Gaston's chambers, therefore, I bent my steps. I found him by his fire, poring over a volume Goborian. He heard the object of my visit with delight, and gleefully rubbed his hands when I assured him of the impenetrable mystery surrounding the loss of the ring. He asked a thousand questions as to the situation of the house, the locks of the cabinet, and other mechanical matters. But at length his queries settled on my housekeeper.

So far from being satisfied with my assurance as to her antecedents, he showed great anxiety to see her testimonials and to possess her photograph. The coincidence, which had struck me forcibly, of the Tsar's murder and the theft of the ring he lightly pooh-poohed. As to my housekeeper's strange conduct, and the painful physical state into which I had been thrown that evening, I left him completely in ignorance—knowing perfectly well that such matters would have only evoked ridicule from the lively disciple of Voltaire.

Leaving Gaston's, after some general talk, I made my loss known at the police headquarters. Then I returned to my home, to spend a night in restless slumbers and vague uneasy dreams.

Days passed, but neither Paul Gaston nor the Metropolitan detectives seemed to make much progress in the search for my ring. And now, perhaps, I had better explain why I attach such importance to the Tsarewitch's gift. The fact was, I had a younger brother in Russia—a brother who, though then estranged from me through the intrigues of those he deemed his friends, had once been my bosom intimate and dearest confidant. This brother, Ernest by name, held a responsible official position in Russia, and it did not seem beyond the bounds of possibility that circumstances might arise to make the pledge of a Tsar of vast importance to him. I had offered him the ring at our last meeting, but his quarrel with me had been too bitter to allow him to accept.

Quarrel or no quarrel, I felt certain that there was a bond between us that neither space nor death could snap, and I began to regularly connect the feeling of depression which I suffered at intervals from the date of the ring's disappearance with the brother far distant in the land of the white Tsar.

Almost a month had elapsed from that date, when, on returning one evening from business, I found a stranger awaiting me. My heart sank on beholding him. His foreign visage, his furs, his travel-wearied air, inspired me with foreboding.

"You are from Russia?" I burst forth excitedly.

The stranger bowed assent. "I come from your brother," he said in his halting, foreign accent.

I read everything in the man's face.

"He is in danger—in prison, perhaps?"

I anticipated, wringing my hands in an agony of apprehension, and my visitor's silence confirmed my fears.

Presently he stepped towards me and whispered in my ear:

"I have come—*for the ring*."

CHAPTER III.

For the Ring! It was the last drop of bitterness in my cup. Controlling my emotion as best I could, I inquired the particulars of my poor brother's disaster.

It was with astonishment I learnt that Ernest had been charged with political conspiracy, and that certain compromising documents had been found amongst his papers. The present messenger, my brother's secretary, had with difficulty cleared himself from suspicion, and, being privately commissioned by Ernest to come to England, had lost not a moment in delay. It was his opinion that some powerful enemy of Ernest's had skilfully plotted his ruin.

M. Comoski's dismay was indescribable when I informed him that the Tsarewitch's ring was lost. He gave way to his feelings in a manner altogether frantic, beating his breast, wringing his hands, and bursting into immoderate tears.

I rang for refreshments, and the maid answered the bell. Her manner was confused and strange, and on inquiring the cause, I learnt that my housekeeper had left the house some minutes before in great haste, carrying the most important of her effects in a travelling case. Calm as Mrs. Benson was naturally, she had been unable to conceal from the girl that she was labouring under strong excitement. I could not doubt from the maid's particulars that my housekeeper had left me for good.

Here was another startling coincidence! A message from Russia arrives for the lost ring, and my housekeeper takes to flight in the same hour. I explained the situation to Comoski, but he was not able to perceive any accountable connection between the events.

I determined immediately to set the police on the track of the fugitive. We drove to Scotland Yard, and thence to Paul Gaston's chambers. He heard the further particulars of my story with amazement and distress.

Then he said:

"Events have forced my hand a little, and I may tell you one thing, Mr. Clapthorne; two of your late housekeepers credentials were forged. Did it not strike you that the earlier and important testimonials were those of persons deceased at the time of presentation? You see it is so difficult to find out about the doings of people who have died. I persevered, however, and I shall give you undoubted proof that no person of Mrs. Benson's description filled either of the alleged situations."

"You take me by surprise," I said, with truth; "and I thank you for your discovery. Still I confess I should value information as to Mrs. Benson's whereabouts much more than the most startling revelations of her antecedents."

Paul smiled. "There you impinge on a second clue which may prove useful. I discovered by the simple means of shadowing, that Mrs. Benson holds communication with a certain shaggy denizen of the Eastern slums. He is as strange a chap as she is a lady, and roosts in a queer crib on the top flat of a rickety tenement, with nothing between him and the sky but slates."

I started to my feet.

"There is not a moment to be lost! She is there at this moment beyond a doubt. Come, Paul—come, M. Comoski, we will take a couple of detectives and drive there instantly. The ring may be in the man's possession at this moment."

Gaston, not ill-pleased that the matter had reached a crisis, instantly consented.

We all three drove to the Yard, and very quickly re-entered our vehicle, accompanied by two able-bodied police officers. Soon the cab entered upon one of the lowest districts of London, and after some ten minutes driving, Gaston opened the window and ordered the driver to stop.

We got out, and turned the narrow lane, Gaston leading the way. At the end of the lane was a filthy cross alley. Into this we dived, and soon emerged into a street, indescribably dirty and neglected. Scarcely a whole window was to be seen, though, to say the truth, the yellow, sickly street lamps afforded small scope to the vision.

"Here we are," said Gaston, and we were soon climbing the stairs, which he had truly described as rickety. Nothing so frail and untrustworthy in the way of steps had ever come under my feet. Up four flights we went in the stealthy, creeping manner advised by our leader. Then Gaston stopped before a door, and rapped firmly three times with the points of his fingers.

Stealthily the door was opened on chain. We were prepared for that. With unanimous force we threw ourselves against it, and chain and staple gave way. We fell pell-mell into the unlighted lobby.

Quick as we had been, the opener of the door had been quicker. As we fell inward he threw himself into the inner room. Before, however, he could close it against us we were after him.

But the apartment was as dark as pitch, being apparently shuttered and barred. Hurriedly a light was struck, but, to our amazement and disgust, we found ourselves alone.

At that moment the door of the room was closed and barred from without. We realised our position. The tenant had escaped into the lobby by some secret way and made us prisoners.

We threw ourselves against the door, but this time we were overmatched. It was of solid oak, with powerful iron cross-bars. We recognised that, unless we could follow our gaoler's manner of exit, we were effectually caged.

Very soon we discovered the secret trap-door in the wall, but as it, too, was locked on the outside, it afforded us small relief. I cast my eyes despairingly round me. On a table at my side lay a peculiarly-handled umbrella and a pair of gloves—articles which I at once recognised as belonging to Mrs. Benson.

At that moment a strange and overpowering odour arose within the room, and increased to a choking stench. I looked despairingly at my companions as through a densely-gathering mist. Gaston was pale and seemed upon the verge of fainting. I felt my own reason grow confused. Things became still hazier, and at length I remembered no more.

Strange visions passed through my brain as I lay helpless. Forms of exaggerated size moved about me, I felt my pockets being rifled one by one, and all the time I was inanimate—lifeless.

At length consciousness returned. My companions were reclining half-dazed round me. I rose and shook them roughly, and they got up. Gaston took out his watch. It indicated ten minutes to nine. We had left Scotland Yard at fifteen minutes to nine. The inference was obvious. We had been unconscious for at least twelve hours.

On realising the manner in which we had been tricked and overpowered, the detectives looked the most disconcerted of the band, but they instantly proceeded to work. On tearing down the window-shutters, the daylight streamed into the room. They next sent the casement flying into the street. It caused a great crash, and soon a throng collected on the pavement beneath. Making signals from the gaping window-niche we speedily attracted attention, and were released from our imprisonment.

I was mad with rage that our prey should have escaped us, but I was soon to have my revenge. We drove to Scotland Yard. A smiling inspector came forward with a photograph in his hand.

"Is this Mrs. Benson?" he asked with a smile.

I recognised my quondam housekeeper, and said so. Comoski was looking over my shoulder.

"Benson!" he said. "This is no Benson. This is Madame Zaleski, proclaimed an enemy and conspirator by the Tsar. I have seen her photo frequently at the police bureau in St. Petersburg."

And in one flash the mystery of the ring came home to me.

Zaleski was the name of the Nihilist from whose hands my father had saved the Tsarewitch's life. He had been ignominiously executed. His mother, mad for revenge, had twice attempted to have my father assassinated. So much I had learned from him, and did not doubt that his enemy and mine were the same. Her hatred had explained a host of mysteries connected with the disappearance of the ring.

I turned to the inspector and asked breathlessly:

"Is she captured?" He nodded.

"And the ring?"

"The ring," said the inspector, stepping to the desk, "the ring is here."

* * * * * *

The remainder of my story must be quickly told. In a word then, the recovered ring was forwarded to St. Petersburg, and proved the means of extricating my brother from the plot in which he had been entangled. At the bottom of the conspiracy Madame Zaleski and a second son had figured.

That a more terrible and successful plot was bound up with this I can only hint. That the part of which I was cognisant had been worked out with an astonishing patience, skill, and forethought cannot be denied. I leave the rest with the reader. There are links in the chain I cannot supply, and for which Paul Gaston's superficial views afford no satisfactory substitute.

Madame Zaleski *alias* Benson is now, with her compatriot, the inmate of a convict prison.

JEROME PARKER.

WHILE this number of S.S. is still current, **Pearson's Magazine** will make its appearance. On Thursday, December 12th, 200,000 copies will be published of this sixpenny monthly.

Though by no means perfect, and very far from being as good as future issues will be, I believe it may without undue boasting be said that no such sixpennyworth has yet been offered to the public.

In our recent numbers enough has been said as to the contents of the **Magazine**. It must now be left to you to decide whether the promises made have been carried out.

Writing with an advance copy of the **Magazine** before me, the chief point with which I am dissatisfied is the *quantity* of the illustrations. The *quality*, I think, leaves little to be desired; but the quantity, though very considerable, is not to my mind sufficient. This is not because of any error in the planning out of the **Magazine**, but owing to disappointments and accidents, which there was no time to rectify, as it was thought desirable to produce the **Magazine** by the day for which it had been announced. Future issues will be illustrated a good deal more profusely.

At the date of penning these lines Number Two is well under way, and I most sincerely wish that it were Number One. The experience gained in arranging the initial issue has resulted in the production of a Second Number, which will, I believe, be considered something quite good.

Our business motto in Henrietta Street has ever been: "There's always room on top." **Pearson's Magazine** has been produced with this motto borne fully in mind.

If the premier position aimed for has been attained, there should be no fears as to its future. If it has not, I am sorry to have bothered you so much unnecessarily.

That £50 IS STILL TO BE WON!

If you have not already tried your hand at the PUZZLE PICTURE in the

EXTRA CHRISTMAS NUMBER
OF
PEARSON'S WEEKLY,

Which is now on Sale, you should do so forthwith.

The amusement and interest derived will alone compensate you for the modest expenditure of Sixpence necessary to purchase our Christmas Number,—not to mention the Three Magnificent Coloured Plates, and the bumper sixpennyworth of stories that are thrown in.

You may send us as many solutions to the PUZZLE PICTURE as you like, but each solution must be made up of the Picture Squares themselves. Figure diagrams will be disqualified.

Advice to those who have already forwarded solutions:

TRY AGAIN!

Advice to all:

TRY! TRY!! TRY!!!

£50 is not to be Sneezed at in these Hard Times.

In a Polish Mazourka.

"What a picture for Paola Veronese!" exclaimed the elder of the two men who entered the ballroom of the Count Lipiniski in Warsaw.

Commencing at first with a kind of timid hesitation, the lady sways about like a bird taking flight; now gliding like a skater, skimming the ice of the polished floor, now running forward like a sportive child.

Again she recommences her sly, graceful dancing, extending her white arms to the partner who comes to rejoin her, and beginning her spirited steps, which transfers her with magic rapidity from one end of the ballroom to the other.

She glides, she runs, she flies, until, panting and exhausted, she reclines in the arms of her partner, who raises her for a moment in the air with vigorous arm before finishing the last intoxicating round.

It is the national dance, the mazourka, at its height.

The two men, who were tardy guests, watched its progress with eager attention.

The younger was a tall, blonde giant, who by his uniform might be easily recognised as an officer of the Russian Army.

His companion, who was a man of perhaps thirty-five years or thereabouts, gave one the impression directly of a man of letters and refinement, one who had seen much of the world already, but who was still young enough for it to be possible that the best of his life was still lying in the future. Not a handsome man, not a countenance which could ever simper from some "Book of Beauty," but a face which might be engraved on more than one woman's heart.

"How thankful am I to have returned to Warsaw," he said at length.

"And yet your exile was a voluntary one," responded Anton Sougaroff, drawing one end of his long moustache fiercely between his teeth.

"Yes, you are right," responded the other. "I was afraid of myself, and yet all my wanderings have been in vain. I cannot forget three years ago. I cannot forget Delphine Podolski. It is a love which has grown with my life—a love that is more to me than my honour!"

Sougaroff was silent.

He, too, had loved this woman, who had turned the gold of life into dross for his companion.

"Ah!" he exclaimed at last, "here she comes. Shall we join the dance, Stanislas? Guard well your heart," he laughed bitterly. "Three years even will not prove a sufficient shelter for it."

They entered the mazy circle and were soon skimming lightly over the floor in the intricacies of the fascinating mazourka, which they danced with the grace and abandon of native Poles.

The Countess Delphine Podolski was the most beautiful woman in all Poland; the most fascinating, the most dangerous.

She was distinguished by an originality full of fire, a Parisian by her grace and elegance, an Eastern dancing girl in her Asiatic languor. Her manners would caress without emboldening, and in her lustrous eyes might be imagined the luxurious indolence of the sultana. Add to this the attraction of a wonderful intelligence, heightened by a splendid education, and what wonder that her lovers were legion, or that her husband so jealously guarded this precious pearl of his. Such a woman as this would love but once, and the Countess Padolski had not married for love.

The couples whirled on and on, faster and more furious than ever, each lady as the dance progressed advancing with a gentleman towards one end of the ballroom, and thence executing a series of difficult manœuvres to the opposite end.

It is the Countess Podolski's turn. A murmur of admiration arose from the assembled spectators as she glided gracefully over the polished floor, and rested her arm lightly within that of the gentleman who came forward to be her partner.

"Delphine!" he whispered rapturously, gazing down at her.

"Stanislas!" she echoed, looking up.

Their eyes met.

Then he knew for a certainty that the love of three years ago was stronger, if anything, now than before.

And Sougaroff, watching, thought bitterly of the luck which had brought him to the Count Lipinski's, and the evil desire which had prompted him to suggest the joining of the dance to Stanislas Jablonowska.

"How she loves him!" he groaned to himself. "She has never had that glorified look upon her face before since I knew her. That was all that was wanting to make her an angel—the light of love in her eyes. What is he saying to her, I wonder?" as he saw the man's blonde head bending tenderly towards the lady.

A dark thought crossed Sougaroff's mind.

There was the weak-minded old Count loitering near the door of an ante-room in patient attendance upon his lovely wife, and so sure in her fidelity that he never scrutinised her partners.

It was to him that the desperate Russian directed his footsteps.

"She loves him! She will never love me!" he whispered fiercely. "Sooner death to us both than life and her love for him."

"Ah, Count, good evening!" he cried, as the old man arose with a vestige of his court manners and saluted the handsome officer. "How beautiful your wife is looking to-night."

"Yes, yes, I believe so," chuckled the Count. "Delphine looks well in anything, you know."

"That is what her partner seems to be thinking," replied Sougaroff, conveying more by his tone than his words. "Do you notice that look of his? I wonder what he can be saying to cause my lady Countess to blush so deeply."

"What! What are you saying, Sougaroff?" gasped the old man. "Do you mean Delphine? She would never listen to anything. She cares too much for me."

Sougaroff glanced at him half pityingly, half scornfully, then suddenly leaning forward he whispered something in his ear.

"Great Heavens!" cried the Count, starting back.

"No, it cannot be. If that is so, I will shoot him and her too."

"Not so fast, my friend," remonstrated the Russian. "Don't be so excited. If you want to do anything desperate take your time about it. You haven't the necessary about you, have you?" clicking his fingers in imitation of a pistol.

"No, Sougaroff, I haven't, but I will kill her if I have to choke her," answered Count Podolski, fairly trembling with rage.

"There now, be calm!" admonished the Russian. "Let us take a glass or two of wine; and see, their figure in the mazourka is over, they are going into the conservatory. Follow them, Count, and you will hear enough to satisfy yourself."

"But you, won't you come, too?" pleaded the old man.

"I am going to step out for a few moments;" and he passed into the night air, busy with his thoughts.

"He shall not have her if I cannot!" he vowed to the silent stars. "I vow that he shall never be happy in her love," and in the still silence of the night seemed to ring out the echo—"Man proposes; God disposes."

Meanwhile Delphine, Countess Podolski, and Stanislas Jablonowska, lovers almost from babyhood, strayed into the dim-lighted conservatory, fatigued a little from the entrancing mazes of the mystic dance.

Every cadence of the man's voice vibrated in Delphine's ear as the echo of the vanished love, the tender declaration of three years ago.

What words, vows, vague hopes had been negligently thrown out during this mazourka.

Ah, but three short years ago and she had thought to find her life's destiny in this man who now stood by her side, so wild and despairing, who had, or could have, no possible claim upon her, and yet of whom forgetfulness had become for ever impossible to her.

"Stanislas, we must never meet again. Oh! why did you come back to me?" she implored, her cheeks burning more through the excitement of emotion than from physical fatigue.

For answer he stooped reverently, and raising one of her tiny hands with the peculiar Slavic *finesse* and delicacy of manner, pressed it to his heart.

"Can you tell me why I returned?" he questioned tenderly. "When I heard you were married I could not believe my senses, but when you refused to see me and passed me in company with your husband, without even a salutation, then I believed all reports, and left Poland as far behind as I could. But to what avail, Delphine? Is there any power an earth sufficient to uproot a love once established?"

"No," responded the Countess. "You know the reports I heard concerning your fidelity, and the almost insurmountable proofs that were furnished me. Afterwards I found them all to be false. I was alone—you had left me. There was one man who constantly sought my hand. Add to this my parents' persuasions, nay, almost commands, and you have the story of my marriage."

"One word, Delphine," interrupted her companion. "Who was your informer as to my constancy?"

"He was yours, also, I imagine," uttered the Countess softly.

"Impossible! Not Sougaroff, who came to me with tears in his eyes and advised me to leave the country at the time of your marriage?"

"The same," answered the lady. "What is it—what is the matter, Stanislas?"

"Did you hear the rustling?" asked the man, looking curiously at a huge palm near the entrance of the conservatory.

"No, I heard nothing," said Delphine; "and now that you are to leave me to-night, Heaven will forgive me if I tell you that you are the only man I have ever loved, and I have been true to you, Stanislas. That I vow. But now we must never meet; you must never speak to me again of these things. They belong to the past, and with us the past should lie among the forgotten things of life."

"And if we cannot forget?" asked her companion; "if our ghost will not be laid, what then? I have found three years of desperate effort useless, gone like a mist at the sight of your face, at the touch of your hand."

"Hush, Stanislas! I have said we must forget. If you care for me, help me to forget. Oh, Stanislas! be my good angel, not my evil one."

"I will, darling, I will," he said solemnly. "I will leave you to-night. Heaven help me to keep away from you. The place you have left is empty, and no other can fill it after you. You have made that impossible," he concluded brokenly. "My heart is like a sealed grave—it is too full of its own dead to let in the living."

The crush of the dancers came nearer to them and nearer—into the conservatory they burst, and cried:

"Countess Podolski and partner. You are wanted for the final round," and out again into the crowded ball room these two glided, their lives to be separated by this final dance, though their hearts were in union for eternity.

"There is my husband dancing," exclaimed Delphine wonderingly. "How strange; he has never taken part before to my knowledge, and he is to be my *vis-à-vis*."

The fury of the mazourka increased. The music seemed to have entered into the blood of the revellers, for they were like mad creatures, rushing here, there, everywhere, in seeming confusion, in reality in perfect order.

Count and Countess Podolski are facing each other for the last round.

They advance, retreat, advance again.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three pistol shots, a cloud of smoke, a frightened crowd of dancers in their fancy garbs, and three souls, a moment before in possession of perfect consciousness, gone to their final reckoning.

By some trick of Fate, Stanislas Jablonowski had fallen backwards, and Delphine, Countess Podolski, lay almost in his arms, the smile occasioned by his last words still lighting up her face.

"Oh, oh!" the world whispered. "The old Count went mad and through jealousy shot his wife and her lover and then turned a ball upon himself. Well, they were always a strange family."

And Sougaroff? He retired from the world.

There are two things he can never bear. He has never seen the little Countess Podolski, who is said to bear such a striking resemblance to her mother, and he cannot listen to the music of a Polish mazourka.

E. GARNET.

A SEVERED HAND

It was while staying with my friend, Tom Grantham, at his father's parsonage in the quaint little town of Retford, that I met the St. Cyrile girls. They were famous all the country over for their beauty; in fact, it is safe to say that no single family in Westmoreland, and perhaps in all England, contained the equals in physical loveliness of these three sisters. Their family was an old one, very old, and their grim, grey-headed old father was as proud as his lineage was lofty and his income scant.

They were all blondes of the purest North of England type. Maud, the eldest, was the tallest of the three, and a veritable queen in her manner and gait. Laura, the second, was almost as stately, and had the same royal poise of the head as her elder sister. But it was Eunice, the youngest, a child of seventeen, who, to my mind, carried off the palm as the fairest of the three.

And it was of Eunice, with her soft cheeks of cream and rose, that my friend Tom was enamoured.

He had left school three years before me, and was now a lieutenant in the army, but our friendship had not been forgotten. Tom was the idol of his father and mother, and as handsome a young officer as any to be found in Her Majesty's army.

His beauty was quite the opposite to Eunice's. He was very tall and broad-shouldered for his twenty-three years, and had thick, coal-black eyebrows and hair. His face was as yet innocent of a moustache, but his resolute mouth and squarely set jaws, gave it all the manliness necessary.

I remembered how bitterly I envied him when he slipped Eunice's arm into his own in the church porch and led the way towards the St. Cyriles' house, while I followed with Maud and Laura, to whom I had previously been introduced. I defy the world to produce a handsomer pair than these two. Eunice's head reached scarcely to her lover's shoulder, and the bewitching yet childlessly innocent way she had of glancing up into his face would have lured a life-long hermit from his solitude to woo her.

In the course of the three weeks I spent at Retford I had plenty of opportunities for observing how violent, how desperate, was my friend's passion. Indeed, he spoke to me of it often himself. Young as he was, his speech was that of a man who has made his cast for all that he values in life, and is determined to abide by the issue. Boy though I might be, I could see that it was a case of life or death with him.

Eunice's father, who was as prudent as most widowers are, had given a reluctant consent to their engagement, but insisted on an improvement in the young man's worldly position as a condition to the settling of the wedding day. And how a poor lieutenant, and the son of a country parson at that, was to overcome that condition it was hard to perceive.

I had been a guest of the Grantham's for about ten days when a visitor came to the St. Cyrile's. He was a retired Indian merchant, with a saffron complexion and small piercing eyes, but fabulously rich, so they said. He treated Tom and myself with quite evident condescension when we dined with the family a couple of days afterwards.

His name was Denton, and he talked of buying property in the neighbourhood. From the first moment I noticed his marked attention to Eunice, and I could not help shuddering at the sight of that evil face so close to hers. By Tom's pallor, too, I was aware that he felt as I did. It was a dismal dinner, and though the merchant ate enormously, I do not think any of the rest enjoyed it.

All through the next week Tom was taciturn and unsociable. He failed to rhapsodise to me about Eunice, and I felt instinctively that some evil was about to happen.

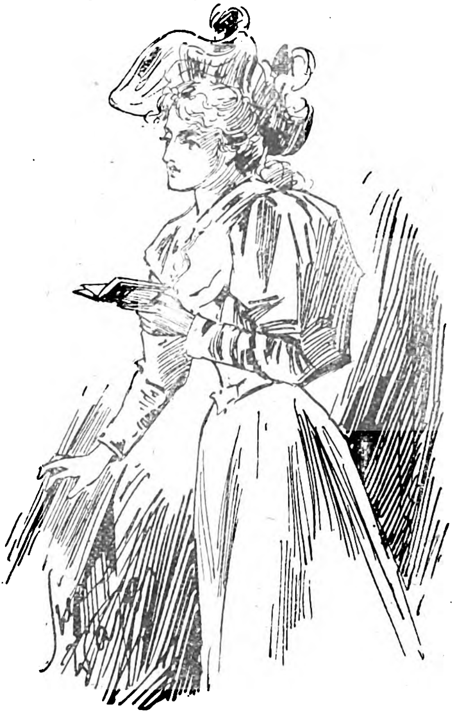
Shall I ever forget that night when she, whom my boyish fancy had pictured as a seraph, fell headlong from the pinnacle upon which I had placed her? I can see her now, as she stood an hour before it happened, by Tom's side, looking up into his face with the smile of an angel out of Heaven.

We were again dining at old St. Cyrile's. It was a farewell dinner, given in my honour, for I was to leave on the morrow. The party was gay enough, though the elderly Indian merchant (who, by the way, appeared to be on the closest terms of intimacy with the master of the house) appeared to still regard our presence as an intrusion.

The evening sped quickly. It was about ten o'clock; Maud and Laura were at the piano, busy with a duet, and Tom was turning their music.

Without thinking where the others could be, I stepped out on the verandah and lighted a cigarette. It was a perfect night. The air was filled with the warmth of early summer, and the moon lit up the tops of the birch trees in the meadow beyond the garden, while far across the fields gleamed Allswater lake like a broad strip of silver.

Suddenly there came two figures pacing slowly across the lawn—Denton and Eunice. I gasped with astonishment, for the merchant's arm was about the girl's slim waist; and they walked so until they came close beneath the place where I stood, when they stopped.



I watched her standing in the high-backed St. Cyrile pew.

The wall behind me was covered with ivy and they could not see me, and just as I was about to make my presence known—oh, shame and confusion—I saw the girl's snowy neck bend, and her head droop upon the stranger's shoulder. Then he took her face between his hands and kissed her on the mouth.

I barely repressed a cry, for that moment I felt a hand grip my arm with the force of a vice, the fingers fairly sinking into my flesh. The pair on the lawn walked slowly round to another door of the house with arms about each other, as lovers walk, Eunice looking like a spirit in her clinging white dress. Then I turned and looked into the face of Tom Grantham, and the look of agony there I hope I shall never see again in the face of a human being.

When we returned to the drawing-room presently, Denton and Eunice were there. She was as fair and unruffled as the saint I had thought her. Denton held an envelope in his hand which he handed to Tom. "A telegram for you, lieutenant," he said coldly. "I took it from a boy at the gate. Your father, it seems, sent it on here."

Tom took the telegram and read it. I marvelled at his composure. "The regiment is ordered to Africa," he said, and thrust the paper in his pocket.

Eunice gave a heart-breaking shriek and rushed upon him.

"How very unfortunate!" observed Denton, with a perceptible sneer.

Grantham turned about and struck him to the floor with a blow from his fist. Then he strode from the room without a glance behind him. Eunice fainted. Her two sisters were too busy attending to her to notice me, and their father was nowhere to be seen. Feeling my presence unnecessary, I followed my friend just as the fallen merchant from India was preparing to rise.

How I came to be a passenger on the troopship that carried the —th from Plymouth does not matter much. The commercial house that commanded my valuable services had some affairs to settle at Cape Town, and as I was the only person in the office ready to volunteer for the mission, my offer was eagerly accepted.

Though I was young my employers were good enough to admit that I had brains. To settle this business was an easy matter, and having a taste for adventure, it wasn't difficult—everything considered, including a little distance—to seek out my friend Tom at the headquarters of his regiment.

How he managed it I do not know, but when I obtained permission to accompany the —th in the guise of a war correspondent, or anything else I might choose to call myself (on condition that I kept out of sight at the proper time, and refrained from talking too much), I availed myself of the privilege with the ardour of a schoolboy let out for a holiday.

The campaign has gone into history, and it is not my purpose to describe it, or justify it either, for that matter. The part played by the —th was not a conspicuous one, hard marches through a dreadful, rough country, with very little to eat and a broiling sky over our heads, were for long our sternest lot.

On these long marches, and in the quiet watches about the campfire, my friend never once spoke of his great sorrow. From the tenor of his conversation, however, I could easily perceive that life had no charm left for him, and that he would welcome as a boon the chance shot or assegai thrust that could end it. His hair, too, was growing grey. Think of it—a soldier, three years out of school, and grey at twenty-four.

When we heard of the death of the Prince Imperial, the widowed Eugénie's only son, Tom sighed and said he envied him. When news reached us of the awful catastrophe of Rorke's Drift, where so many brave fellows went down, he gritted his teeth and vowed he would like to strike a blow for vengeance before the war was done.

The final battle of Ulundi, which was followed shortly by the capture of Cetewayo and the termination of the war, was a most bloody affair. It was here that the —th performed its magnificent and almost only service of the campaign.

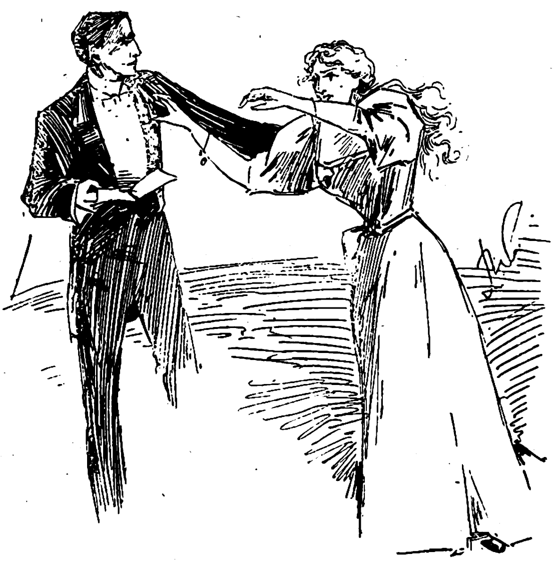
Through the long afternoon the Zulu warriors fought with the superb ferocity that has marked them out as the heroes of all the savage tribes. Their superior numbers availed them little. Again and again, with dauntless bravery, they hurled themselves upon the

British line, only to be slaughtered in masses by the murderous artillery fire. They were doomed, and they knew it; but black and naked as they were, they swarmed to their fate and died like men.

But too many of Her Majesty's soldiers were falling; the victory was being delayed too long. At last the —th received the coveted order to charge and put the black hordes to rout.

By some means or other a sort of fever had got into my blood. I did not ache to go into action, but certain smiles and witticisms exchanged by some of the officers in my hearing had produced a desire in me to show that, though not a professional warrior hired to kill blackamoors at so much a day, I was not wholly without courage.

This was why I had sidled dexterously upon my grey mare until I was within a few paces of Tom, who sat motionless in his saddle, calm as an icicle, with a red spot on each of his cheeks. I had pistols in my holsters and a good cavalry sabre in my hand, and when the trumpet sounded the charge, and that superb body of horse went thundering over the plain, something seemed to snap in my head, and away I went, involuntarily, perhaps, but with an insane desire to take part in the fray.



Eunice gave a heart-breaking shriek and rushed upon him.

A couple of troopers, pierced through the breast with assegais, fell crashing from their saddles, and I came up with the advancing line at a furious gallop. In another instant we were in the mass of savages. In a sort of dream I saw a sea of fierce black faces about me. Some of the savages crouched under the bellies of the horses, and disembowelled them as they were trampled under foot. Others, giants in stature, stood straight up, with their brawny naked arms raised to heaven, and actually laughed as the troops cut them down. These blacks knew no fear. In solid detachments they stood before the onslaught of the enemy, no man flinching before the certain death that was imminent, as each fought desperately against the trained troops of a powerful country.

I saw Tom's face, set and stern, as he hewed about him like a templar of old, one hand gripping his bridle rein, and in the other his deadly sabre rising aloft, and falling to cleave a woolly skull.

For myself, I suppose I was fighting like the rest. I was conscious only of a wild feeling of exhilaration—a sort of composed joy that I was a participator in such a matchless scene. I felt a spear thrust that pierced the fleshy part of my arm above the elbow, and slashed mechanically at the head of the gigantic savage who had dealt me the wound.

And just as suddenly as the attack began the heroic foemen melted away. With loud cries they turned and fled. In all directions they scattered, leaving the dead upon the field. The quick African dusk was stealing down as the trumpets sounded a retirement, and I drew rein with the rest. The battle of Ulundi was won, and the Zulu war was over.

Many and many a gallant trooper lay prone upon the rank grass. Some were clasped in the embrace of a black foe with whom they had fought to the death. And as I paused, watching the flight of the vanquished enemy, there came upon me a most terrible apparition.

Lieutenant Grantham threw his charger back upon his haunches in front of me. His helmet was gone and his black hair disordered, while a thin stream of blood trickled down his cheek. "Ha!" he shrieked, "is it not glorious, this—this butchery? It is the first thing I have found yet that could make me FORGET!"

I felt my hair rising on end, for I saw by the glare in the man's eyes that he was a maniac. And then (I can see the dreadful picture as I write) he slowly raised his left arm, and I saw that his left hand had been almost severed at the wrist. It was hanging by a mere thread of flesh.

"See!" he screamed, as I tried to catch his bridle and lead him from the field. "See, my boy, they gave me as good as I brought"—holding the ghastly, blood-streaming hand aloft. "I am going now—for ever. This hand has her ring upon it. Take it back to her and say I sent it."

With a wild yell he wheeled his charger and dashed headlong all alone after the fugitive black rabble, leaving his terrible relic behind him. I tried to follow him, but weakened perhaps by the loss of blood from the wound in my arm, I reeled and fell from my saddle to the ground.

For days afterwards we searched for him. Dead or alive, he was never found. Was he captured or cut to pieces by the vanquished foe, or does he live to-day in the African forests among the savages, saved by his madness from a knowledge of his fate?

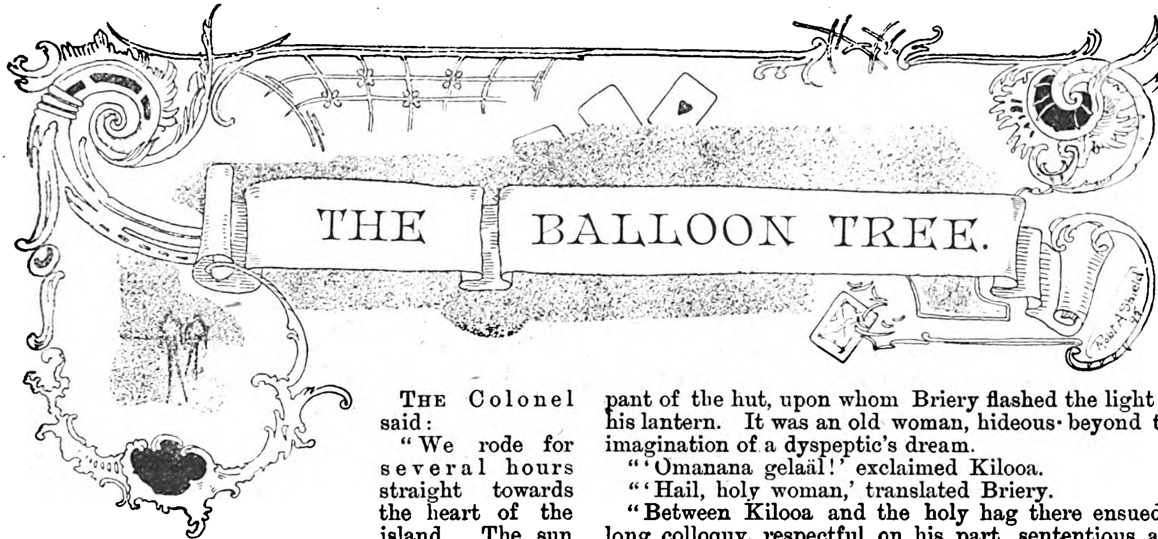
To England the report went back with the rest of the tragic list: "Lieut. Thomas Grantham—missing."

In a quiet English village a white-haired clergyman and his wife wait in vain for the son who never comes back.

Mrs. Denton, they say, is quite the belle of the county, and her diamonds are the admiration and envy of all the country-side.

It is a spiteful thought, but sometimes I wish I could have found that hand, with the diamond ring upon it, on the field of Ulundi, to bring back to her as I was bidden.

J. T. Weare.



THE BALLOON TREE.

THE Colonel said:

"We rode for several hours straight towards the heart of the island. The sun was low in the western sky when we left the ship. Neither on the water nor on the land had we felt a breath of air stirring. The glare was upon everything. Over the low range of hills miles away in the interior hung a few copper-coloured clouds. 'Wind,' said Briery. Kilooa shook his head.

"Vegetation of all kinds showed the effects of the long continued drought. The eye wandered without relief from the sickly russet of the undergrowth, so dry in places that leaves and stems crackled under the horses' feet, to the yellowish brown of the thirsty trees that skirted the bridle-path. No growing thing was green except the bell-top cactus, fit to flourish in the crater of a living volcano.

"Kilooa leant over in his saddle and tore from one of these plants its top, as big as a Californian pear, and bloated with juice. He crushed the bell in his fist, and, turning, flung into our hot faces a few grateful drops of water.

"Then the guide began to talk rapidly in his language of vowels and liquids. Briery translated for my benefit.

"The god Lalala loved a woman of the island. He came in the form of fire. She, accustomed to the ordinary temperature of the clime, only shivered before his approaches. Then he wooed her as a shower of rain, and won her heart. Kakal was a divinity, much more powerful than Lalala, but malicious to the last degree. Healso coveted the woman, who was very beautiful. Kakal's importunities were in vain. In spite, he changed her to a cactus, and rooted her to the ground under the burning sun; the god Lalala was powerless to avert this vengeance, but he took up his abode with the cactus woman, still in the form of a rain-shower, and never left her, even in the driest weather. Thus it happens that the bell-top cactus is an unfailing reservoir of pure, cold water.

"Long after dusk we reached the channel of a vanished stream, and Kilooa led us for several miles along its dry bed. We were exceedingly tired when the guide bade us dismount. He tethered the panting horses, and then dashed into the dense thicket on the bank. A hundred yards of scrambling and we came to a poor thatched hut. The savage raised both hands above his head and uttered a musical falsetto, not unlike the yodel peculiar to the Valais. This call brought out the occupant of the hut, upon whom Briery flashed the light of his lantern. It was an old woman, hideous beyond the imagination of a dyspeptic's dream.

"'Omanana gelaäl!' exclaimed Kilooa.

"'Hail, holy woman,' translated Briery.

"Between Kilooa and the holy hag there ensued a long colloquy, respectful on his part, sententious and impatient on hers. Briery listened with eager attention. Several times he clutched my arm, as if unable to repress his anxiety. The woman seemed to be persuaded by Kilooa's arguments or won by his intreaties. At last she pointed towards the south-east, slowly pronouncing a few words that apparently satisfied my companions.

"The direction indicated by the holy woman was still towards the hills, but twenty or thirty degrees to the left of the general course, which we had pursued since leaving the shore.

"'Push on! push on!' cried Briery. 'We can afford to lose no time.'

* * * * * *

"We rode all night. At sunrise there was a pause of hardly ten minutes for the scanty breakfast supplied by our haversacks. Then we were again in the saddle, making our way through a thicket that grew more and more difficult, and under a sun that grew hotter.

"'Perhaps,' I remarked finally to my taciturn friend, 'you have no objection to telling me now why two civilised beings and one amiable savage should be plunging through this infernal jungle, as if they were on an errand of life or death?'

"'Yes,' said he, 'it is best you should know.'

"Briery produced from an inner breast-pocket a letter which had been read and re-read until it was worn in the creases.

"'This,' he went on, 'is from Professor Quakversuch of the University of Upsala. It reached me at Valparaiso.'

"Glancing cautiously round, as if he feared that every tree fern in that tropical wilderness was an eavesdropper, or that the hood-like spathes of the giant caladiums overhead were ears waiting to drink in some mighty secret of science, Briery read in a low voice from the letter of the Swedish botanist:

"'You will have in those islands a rare opportunity to investigate certain extraordinary accounts given me years ago by the Jesuit missionary, Buteaux, concerning the Migratory Tree, the *cereus vagrans* of Jansenius and other speculative physiologists.

"'The explorer Spohr claims to have beheld it; but there is reason, as you know, for accepting all of Spohr's statements with caution.

"'That is not the case with the assertion of my late valued correspondent, the Jesuit missionary. Father Buteaux was a learned botanist, an accurate observer, and a most pious and conscientious man. He never saw the Migratory Tree; but during the long period of his labours in that part of the world he accumulated, from widely different sources, a mass of testimony as to its existence and habits.

"'Is it quite inconceivable, my dear Briery, that somewhere in the range of Nature there is a vegetable organism as far above the cabbage, let us say, in complexity and potentiality, as the ape is above the polyp? Nature is continuous. In all her schemes we find no chasms, no gaps. There may be missing links in our books and classifications and cabinets, but there are none in the organic world. Is not all of lower nature struggling upward to arrive at the point of self-consciousness and volition? In the unceasing process of evolution, differentiation, improvement in special function, why may not a plant arrive at this point, and feel, will, act—in short, possess and exercise the characteristics of the true animal?'

"Briery's voice trembled with enthusiasm as he read this passage:

"'I have no doubt' (continued Professor Quakversuch) 'that if it shall be your great good fortune to encounter a specimen of the Migratory Tree described by Buteaux, you will find that it possesses a well-defined system of real nerves and ganglia, constituting, in fact, the seat of vegetable intelligence. I conjure you to be very thorough in your dissections. According to the indications furnished me by the Jesuit, this extraordinary tree should belong to the order of Cactaceæ. It should be developed only in conditions of extreme heat and dryness. Its roots should be hardly more than rudimentary, affording a precarious attachment to the earth. This attachment it should be able to sever at will, soaring up into the air and away to another place selected by itself, as a bird shifts its habitation. I infer that these migrations are accomplished by means of the property of secreting hydrogen gas, with which it inflates itself out of the ground and off to a new abode. Buteaux added that the Migratory Tree was invariably worshipped by the natives as a supernatural being, and that the mystery thrown by them round its cult was the greatest obstacle in the path of the investigator.'

"'There!' exclaimed Briery, folding up Professor Quakversuch's letters; 'is not that a question worthy the risk or sacrifice of life itself? To add to the recorded facts of vegetable morphology the proved existence of a tree that wanders, a tree that wills, a tree perhaps that thinks—this is glory to be won at any cost! The lamented De Candolle of Geneva——'

"'Confound the lamented De Candolle of Geneva!' shouted I, for it was excessively hot, and I felt that we had come on a fool's errand.

* * * * * *

"It was near sunset on the second day of our journey when Kilooa, who was riding several yards in advance of us, uttered a quick cry, leapt from his saddle, and stooped to the ground.

"Briery was at his side in an instant. I followed with less agility; my joints were very stiff, and I had no scientific enthusiasm to lubricate them. Briery was on his hands and knees, eagerly examining what seemed to be a recent disturbance of the soil. The savage was prostrate, rubbing his forehead in the dust as if in a religious ecstasy, and warbling the same falsetto notes that we had heard at the holy woman's hut.

"'What beast's trail have you struck?' I demanded.

"'The trail of no beast,' answered Briery almost angrily. 'Do you see this broad, round abrasion of the surface, where a heavy weight has rested? Do you see these little troughs in the fresh earth, radiating from the centre like the points of a star? They are the scars left by slender roots torn up from their shallow beds. Do you see Kilooa's hysterical performance? I tell you we are on the track of the Sacred Tree. It has been here not long ago.'

"Acting under Briery's excited instructions, we continued the hunt on foot. Kilooa started towards the east, I towards the west, and Briery took the southward course.

"To cover the ground thoroughly we agreed to advance in gradually-widening zigzags, communicating with each other at intervals by pistol shots. There could have been no more foolish arrangement. In a quarter of an hour I had lost my head and my bearings in a thicket. In another quarter of an hour I discharged my revolver repeatedly, without getting a single response from east or south. I spent the remainder of daylight in a blundering effort to make my way back to the place where the horses were; and then the sun went down, leaving me in sudden darkness, alone in a wilderness of the extent and character of which I had not the faintest idea.

"I will spare you the history of my sufferings during the whole of that night, and the next day, and the next day, and another day. When it was dark I wandered about in blind despair, longing for daylight, not daring to sleep or even to stop, and in continual terror of the unknown dangers that surrounded me. In the daytime I longed for night, for the sun scorched its way through the thickest roof that the luxuriant foliage afforded, and drove me nearly mad. The provisions in my haversack were exhausted. My canteen was on my saddle; I should have died of thirst had it not been for the bell-top cactus, which I found twice. But in that horrible experience, neither the torture of hunger and thirst nor the torture of heat equalled the misery of the thought that my life was to be sacrificed to the delusion of a crazy botanist, who had dreamed of the impossible.

"The impossible?

"On the second afternoon, still staggering aimlessly on through the jungle, I lost my last strength and fell to the ground. Despair and indifference had long since given way to an eager desire for the end. I closed my eyes with an indescribable relief; the hot sun seemed pleasant on my face as consciousness departed.

"Did a beautiful and gentle woman come to me while I lay unconscious, and take my head in her lap, and put her arms round me? Did she press her face to mine, and in a whisper bid me have courage? That was the belief that filled my mind when I struggled back for a moment into consciousness. I clutched at the warm, soft arms, and swooned again.

"Do not look at each other and smile, gentlemen; in that cruel wilderness, in my helpless condition, I found pity and benignant tenderness. The next time my senses returned I saw that something *was* bending over me—something majestic, if not beautiful; humane, if not human; gracious, if not woman. The arms that held me and drew me up were moist, and they throbbed with the pulsation of life. There was a faint, sweet odour, like the smell of a woman's perfumed hair. The touch was a caress, the clasp an embrace.

“Can I describe its form? No, not with the definiteness that would satisfy the Quakversuchs and Brierys. I saw that the trunk was massive. The branches that lifted me from the ground and held me carefully and gently were flexible and symmetrically disposed, Above my head there was a wreath of strange foliage, and in the midst of it a dazzling sphere of scarlet. The scarlet globe grew while I watched it; but the effort of watching was too much for me.

“It seemed the most natural thing in the world that in my extreme weakness I should be beloved and cared for by a cactus. I did not seek an explanation of this good fortune, nor try to analyse it; I simply accepted it as a matter of course, as a child accepts a benefit from an unexpected quarter. The one idea that possessed me was that I had found an unknown friend, instinct with womanly feeling, and immeasurably kind.

“And as night came on it seemed to me that the scarlet bulb overhead became enormously distended, so that it almost filled the sky. Was I gently rocked by the supple arms that still held me? Were we floating off together into the air? I did not know nor care. Now I fancied that I was in my berth on board ship, cradled by the swell of the sea; now, that I was sharing the flight of some great bird; now, that I was borne on with prodigious speed through the darkness by my own volition. The sense of incessant motion affected all my dreams. Whenever I awoke I felt a cool breeze steadily beating against my face—the first breath of air since we had landed. I was vaguely happy. I had surrendered all responsibility for my own fate. I had gained the protection of a being of superior powers.

* * * * *

“‘The brandy flask, Kilooa!’

“It was daylight. I lay upon the ground, and Briery was supporting my shoulders. In his face was a look of bewilderment that I shall never forget.

“‘My God!’ he cried; ‘and how did you get here? We gave up the search two days ago.’

“The brandy pulled me together. I staggered to my feet and looked round. The cause of Briery's extreme amazement was apparent at a glance. We were not in the wilderness. We were at the shore. There was the bay and the ship at anchor, half a mile off. They were already lowering a boat to send for us.

“And there to the south was a bright red spot on the horizon, hardly bigger than the morning star—the Balloon Tree returning to the wilderness. I saw it, Briery saw it, the savage Kilooa saw it. We watched it till it vanished. We watched it with different emotions —Kilooa with superstitious reverence, Briery with scientific interest and intense disappointment; I with a heart full of wonder and gratitude.

“I clasped my forehead with both hands. It was no dream, then. The tree, the caress, the embrace, the scarlet bulb, the night journey through the air, were not creations and incidents of delirium. Call it tree, or call it plant-animal—there it was! Let men of science quarrel over the question of its existence in nature; this I know: *It had found me dying, and had brought me more than a hundred miles straight to the ship to which I belonged.* Under Providence, gentlemen, that sentient and intelligent vegetable organisation had saved my life.”

* * * * *

At this point the Colonel got up and left the club. He was very much moved. Pretty soon Briery came in, briskly as usual. He picked up an uncut copy of Lord Bragmuch's “Travels in Kerguelen's Land,” and settled himself in an easy chair at the corner of the fire-place.

Young Traddles timidly approached the veteran globe-trotter. “Excuse me, Mr. Briery,” said he, “but I should like to ask you a question about the Balloon Tree. Were there scientific reasons for believing that its sex was——”

“Ah,” interrupted Briery, looking bored; “the Colonel has been favouring you with that extraordinary narrative? Has he honoured me again with a share in the adventure? Yes? Well, did we bag the game this time?”

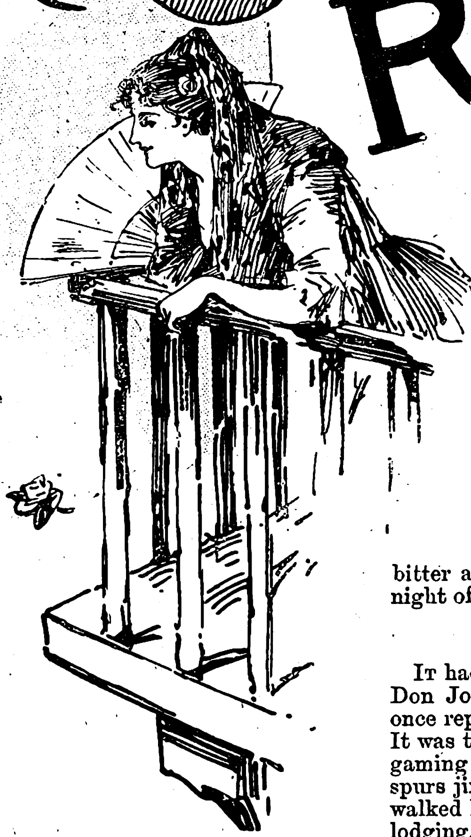
“Why, no,” said young Traddles; “you last saw the tree as a scarlet spot against the horizon.”

“Ah!” said Briery calmly, beginning to cut the leaves of his book.

Richard Sibert.

THE SCULPTOR'S REVENGE

Translated from the French of
Rene Margeary.



CHAPTER I.

At the end of the long, silent studio, where the sun's golden arrows broke against the round, lead-circled windows, sat Esteban Cucharez, the greatest sculptor in all Spain. Leaning upon his elbow, his eyes fixed dreamily upon a priestly missal, illuminated by a pious hand long turned to dust, he chanted to himself in a broken voice the mournful voices which tell of the Passion.

The plaster upon the bare walls was blackened with strange sketches; of bodies writhing in fearful torment, of heads with eyes whose light was almost quenched with tears, with hair damp and matted by the sweat of anguish, and lips close pressed that never more would open to the supreme cry of agony. Scattered about in confusion were the tools of the sculptor, amongst them pieces of ivory—hardly touched, as if the artist had cast them from him in despair—and upon the worn pavement, barring off one end of the studio, lay a great cross of black wood.

Some weeks had passed since the Bishop of Burgos had ordered Esteban Cucharez to make a crucifix for the high altar of the cathedral, and during that time he had remained in his *atelier*, opening the door to no one, living like those fervent anchorites who dwell in desert solitude, haunted by mystic visions.

Absorbed in his work, he was indifferent to all else. He forgot Dolores, his beautiful young bride, leaving her alone day after day in the great, gloomy house, where music and laughter never echoed. She was weary of life and of her husband—forty years her senior—who had no other passion than his art, and by whose side she seemed like a lily drooping in the shadow of a ruined wall. While she sat upon the balcony listlessly fanning herself, the sculptor carved his bits of ivory or made new sketches.

When exhausted he would throw himself down upon his hard couch, his sleep would be broken by dreams of bodies twisted with pain, and he woke in despair of ever being able to fashion an image, whose mournful face and muscles knotted in agony, should express more eloquently than ever before the bitter anguish that our Saviour suffered in the awful night of Golgotha.

CHAPTER II.

It had been an unlucky day for the gallant Captain Don José Santabalzo; the Goddess of Chance had not once repaid with her golden smile his faithful worship. It was twilight when, with empty pockets, he left the gaming table and turned his steps homewards. With spurs jingling and sword tapping against his heels, he walked leisurely along the quiet street which led to his lodging, glancing upwards occasionally at the iron-barred windows.

The captain was about to enter his house when he perceived upon a balcony across the way the Señora Cucharez, sitting motionless, leaning wearily her cheek upon her hand.

"By San José, my holy patron," said he to himself, "it would be indeed a benevolent and worthy task to make cheerful that poor girl." And raising his hat with a gallant gesture he saluted, very respectfully, the fair unknown. Dolores' face brightened with a smile, and she let fall from her corsage a half faded bouquet. As reverently as a pious monk handles some precious relic, Don José picked up the flowers and covered them with kisses.

Thus the romance began. For several days thereafter at the same calm, twilight hour the scene was repeated. Then they commenced to exchange letters, whose phrases vibrated like the music of a serenade, and in whose lines one could trace the fierce tumult of the writer's heart.

Soon Dolores knew the poignant anxiety of waiting behind a church pillar, or in the deep shadow of the confessional, the coming of her friend. With what lagging feet the moments flew, and how she started with affright at every sound that broke the silence! With what straining eyes she would search the empty nave, sometimes half-believing she could see her husband emerging from the gloom, seeking her mad with rage!

Little by little these fears forsook her. Then, each night, she would come gliding cautiously along the corridor and down the long winding staircase, the bare feet noiseless upon the stones, stopping at the least sound, pausing a long time by the door of Esteban's studio, and listening for his deep breathing as he lay asleep upon his hard couch, worn out with fatigue. Then the door at the foot of the stairs would be softly opened, another figure would enter the silent house, and together they would clamber the staircase. They thought not of the morrow, and Fate sent no warning of when the end of their dream would come, or how.

Meanwhile, the great black cross still lay upon the floor of the *atelier*, and the figure of Christ, which the Bishop of Burgos had commanded, hung not yet upon its arms. Inspiration came not to the master as of old, and he suffered cruelly in spirit, seeing himself forced to avow his inability, and to renounce the work which he had dreamed should make his glory fadeless. He fancied he could hear the mocking words of the other sculptors, and see the pitying smile on the face of the priests. Then the tears rolled down his wrinkled cheeks.

At last, after months of bitter anguish, late one night he threw down his tools in despair and resolved to abandon his task. For the first time he thought of his young wife, whose velvet eyes and red lips he had so long forgotten. He cursed his art. He would implore her pardon for his past neglect, and in her sympathy would find a balm for his shattered hopes and his broken pride. At that late hour she would be sound asleep, and as he directed his steps towards her chamber, he pictured to himself her surprise and bewilderment when she awoke.

But, pushing open the door, Esteban staggered like a drunken man, and would have fallen had he not supported himself against the wall. By the brilliant moonlight streaming through the window, he saw Dolores and Don José sitting on a couch where they had fallen asleep.

The old man regarded them fixedly for a few moments. Then his thin lips curled with an evil smile. He spoke not a word, but his face was distorted with terrible rage as he fixed both hands upon Don José's throat with a vice-like grip. The captain struggled for an instant, his lips parted convulsively, his eyes seemed starting from their sockets, and then he fell back, limp and senseless. Dolores sprang up, shivering, insane with terror, filling the room with her cries.

"Be quiet," commanded Esteban, striking her brutally in the face. "Your lover is not dead. I know a good remedy which will revive him quickly."

Then, with superhuman strength, he lifted upon his back the inert body of Don José, and, driving his wife before him, carried it to the deserted studio.

"What are you going to do?" she moaned, wringing her hands despairingly.

Cucharez did not respond, except to mutter between his teeth some incoherent phrases.

"The bishop need fear no more delay," said he. "He will have his crucifix, and the sculptors will not rail at me after all."

He extended the body upon the cross that cumbered the flagstones with its black bulk.

"What are you going to do?" repeated Dolores.

"Bring me the hammer and the spikes," he commanded, and as she stirred not to obey, he struck her such a blow that she fell upon the floor.

"Did you hear?" he said.

She brought him the tools.

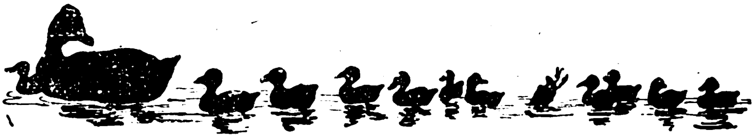
"Mark well," continued he, "how Cucharez avenges his honour."

He rolled up his sleeves and knelt beside the cross. Stretching out the arms of Don José, he began to drive the nails through the soft, white hands of his victim. As the spikes entered the flesh the blood spurted forth, reddening the hands of the sculptor. Extreme suffering resuscitated the captain. He wept and cursed and prayed by turns. His features twisted with pain, his bones cracked. He supplicated the old man to pardon him, to cease his punishment; but Cucharez's ears were deaf to his pleadings, and the blows of the hammer followed each other slowly, heavily, driving the spikes home into the black wood.

When the sculptor rose after having nailed the feet, Don Jose was at the point of death. Then Esteban turned to leave the studio. As he closed the door upon Dolores and her lover he said pitilessly: "Good night, faithless one."

CHAPTER III.

The next Sunday the crucifix of the master Esteban Cucharez was solemnly blessed by the Burgos. In the shadow of the great pillars it was miraculous in its reality, with its shrivelled skin and clotted blood staining the decomposing flesh. But they looked in vain for the sculptor. He had disappeared from Burgos with his wife, after having placed, unaided, his greatest work in the cathedral. And one day, during the service, the half-decayed body of Don José Santabalzo fell from the cross in the midst of the kneeling worshippers.



Half a Handkerchief.

IF there was one thing Mr. Horace Wingrave objected to more than another, it was a debating society; and of all the debating societies that came under the notice of this amiable gentleman, the Eagle Young Man's Debating Society was by far the most objectionable.

"What do the young idiots expect to gain by wasting their breath on the senseless twaddle discussed at their meetings?" he asked a friend one day; and, as a hard-headed business man, he saw no interest in the intellectual benefits derived from membership.

"Bless my soul," he continued, "when I was a young man such tomfoolery never existed, and instead of spending hour after hour in useless talking, all my spare time was devoted to work, sir, to work."

The reason why the old gentleman was so concerned about this society in particular was to be found in the fact that Wyndham Holgate, his confidential secretary, was both organiser and president of the E.Y.M.D.S., in which capacity a great deal of his time was occupied.

Holgate was twenty-five, smart, and good-looking; and his business abilities were fully appreciated by his employer.

Had the young man been anything but shrewd and capable as regards his secretarial duties, Mr. Wingrave would probably have dismissed him long before, so prejudiced was he against the debating society.

But he knew with whom he was dealing, and rather than give offence he showed his disapprobation of Holgate's conduct by delivering periodical lectures on the wasted energy which that young man threw into his unremunerative work.

And things became still more complicated when it was known that Wyndham had fallen in love with Emma, his employer's daughter, and that the young lady had not looked with disfavour on his suit.

When the alarming news came to the ears of the old man, he stamped and raved, declaring by all that was natural that the audacious Holgate should leave his employ the following morning.

But things did not come to such a pass as this, for a few minutes previous to his employer's arrival at the office, Wyndham succeeded in transacting a smart piece of business, by which he saved the firm some hundreds of pounds; and this tended to lessen the severity of the blow which fell upon his shoulders.

Mr. Wingrave contented himself therefore with forbidding Holgate his house. The meetings between the lovers had, in consequence, to be clandestine. They were none the less frequent for that. The old man never suspected his daughter capable of such a thing.

Emma Wingrave was quite willing to wait until her father's consent should be obtained; and this would not be very long, Wyndham assured her, for the father could not hold out for ever, and ruin his daughter's future happiness, simply because of the prejudice he maintained against the Eagle Debating Society.

Mr. Wingrave had been in the volunteers ever since he was a young man, and at this time he was Colonel of the West Dashton Rifles, of which regiment Wyndham Holgate and most of the young men in Mr. Wingrave's establishment were members.

Thanks to his natural energy and perseverance, Holgate had risen in due course to the position of adjutant, and, proud as the old gentleman was of his private secretary, he was still prouder of his Adjutant Holgate.

By this time the Eagle Debating Society had developed into a large concern, and on one memorable occasion the delighted members, wishing to show some appreciation of their president's efficiency, presented him with a handsome watch, and moved and carried a resolution to the effect that a fixed salary should be paid to him.

This, of course, linked Holgate still more firmly with the Eagles, and though I believe he would previously have given serious consideration to the idea of severing his connection with them altogether in order to obtain Mr. Wingrave's consent to his daughter's union, such a course was now out of the question.

It was not Mr. Wingrave's principle to say one thing and mean another. He was a man of his word, he declared; and those who had anything to do with him were all at one on that point.

But the redoubtable Wyndham did not in the least despair; in fact, the very contumacy that the old man exhibited in respect of his suit lent a spice of romance to the courtship, and made the stolen meetings all the more delightful.

"If you would only give up that abominable society, the girl is yours," exclaimed the old gentleman on the occasion of one of his lectures, after Holgate had fixed up another smart piece of business.

It was manifest that Mr. Wingrave would have given much in order to have taken Wyndham as his son-in-law without any qualms of conscience. But he had spoken once on the subject—rashly, perhaps—and now he would never go back on his word—no, never.

The Easter manœuvres were approaching, and preparations were made for the departure of the West Dashtons for the scene of action.

Under the command of Colonel Wingrave the regiment travelled down to engage the regulars in mortal combat.

The weather was extremely hot, and after the first day's toil of fighting, marching, reconnoitring, scouting, and assaulting, few men in the Dashton Rifles felt as blithe and gay as they had done on the day of arrival.

The nights were bitterly cold, and on the second day Colonel Wingrave, returning in the early hours of the morning from a mess dinner, caught a chill, magnified tenfold by the prospect of the march past before the General on the following morning.

Reaching his tent, the Colonel dispatched his orderly for the surgeon, while the unfortunate officer sneezed himself hoarse.

When his servant returned, the Colonel was already between the blankets, his nose carefully tallowed with the tent candle, and a huge scarf wrapped threefold round his head.

Naturally, it was very little the doctor could do. He simply dosed his patient with hot brandy and water, and ordered him to keep warm.

As in business, so in warfare; Horace Wingrave was a slave to duty. Although it was possible for him to absent himself from the inspection on the morrow on a plea of indisposition, such a course never entered his head; he would go if he had 10,000 colds. His anxiety was the sorry figure he would cut before the eyes of the regular as well as the volunteer troops—a drawn sword in one hand, and a pocket-handkerchief in the other.

When the morning broke a slight frost lay upon the ground, and the air was keen and cutting. The Colonel awoke with a violent sneeze that shook him to the core, and which was followed by a number of minor spasmodic efforts to allay the gentle titillation of his nostrils.

Hastily getting into his trousers and tunic, the Colonel buckled on his sword, and dived into the bottom of his camp trunk for half-a-dozen pocket-handkerchiefs which he had taken the precaution to procure.

Then he mounted his horse and galloped off to the parade ground. He was in excellent time, for the General had not yet arrived.

Reining up sharply, he proceeded to walk his horse along the front of the lines with all the dignity of a volunteer Colonel.

The bleak air of the morning irritated him, and before a hundred yards had been covered he prepared to blow his nose, when, dash it all! where was his pocket-handkerchief?

Neither up his sleeve nor in the breast of his tunic was the missing article to be found. As a last resource he removed his cap and searched the inside.

A gust of bitterly cold wind blew upon his unprotected head, and hastily replacing his helmet, Colonel Wingrave sat gazing vacantly in front of him, while tears filled his eyes in his endeavour to restrain the frightful nasal outburst which every minute threatened to break the stillness of the morning air.

Digging his spurs viciously into the horse's flanks, he cantered towards an officer standing a short distance off.

It proved to be a business acquaintance of his, and the courage of the unfortunate man rose in anticipation of the loan of a pocket-handkerchief.

"Mording, Mr. Parsons. Hab you such a thig as a pocket-hadkerchief about you? I've beed an' lef' mide at headquarters, ad I hab such a codfouded code."

"Sorry to hear that, Mr. Wingrave, but I'm still more sorry to say that I haven't a handkerchief to spare. Have a touch of influenza myself."

Colonel Wingrave gave a most despairing look at the speaker, then turned and rode disconsolately away, vowing that the next piece of business transacted with Parsons should be to the latter's disadvantage.

He could contain himself no longer now; the sneeze must have its way. But, zounds, his nose was troubling him.

The General was now approaching the parade-ground, and no eye in the whole Army could equal his for discerning the slightest defect in both officers and men. And every spot on the Colonel's uniform would show like ink on a sheet of white paper.

The General, too, was all the more keen on discovering blemishes, for the regiment was a volunteer one.

Colonel Wingrave was furious. The General was certain to observe the stains on his tunic, was certain to make due note of the observation, and would probably pass some remark concerning them to the Colonel himself. Then he would be disgraced. The thought was too horrible. He gave one despairing look round.

At the head of the Dashton Rifles Adjutant Holgate was walking his horse slowly up and down, awaiting the arrival of the Colonel.

Wingrave soon espied him. He hated to place himself under an obligation to the young fellow, and there was, of course, the chance that the Adjutant had but one pocket-handkerchief and a touch of influenza as well.

Cantering up, the Colonel said:

"Mording, Holgate. I caught a codfouded code last night, ad haben't a hadkerchief about me. Suppose you haben't a spare wud?"

The Colonel said this with little hope of success, but to his intense satisfaction the young man drew a large silk handkerchief down his sleeve, and handed it to the Colonel, retaining, however, the grip of one corner.

"I've only one, Colonel, but you are welcome to half."

Then he drew his sword, and sliced the silk from top to bottom, leaving by far the greater portion in the elder man's hand.

"How on earth can I thank you enough?" exclaimed the grateful officer, between the trumpet-like blasts which followed. The reply was quick:

"By forgetting that I am president of the Eagle Debating Society."

Colonel Wingrave beamed on him over the cluster of red silk which surrounded his nose. He was in such a perfectly happy state of mind that he would have granted almost anything at that moment.

He realised the results that would accrue when he gave his answer, but, for once in his life, the old gentleman went back on his word.

"I dare say," he said, "by a violent effort I shall be able to obliterate the fact that you are in any way connected with the Eagle Debating Society."

He finished up with a blast that almost drowned the last few words, then turned, and cantered away, just as the General and his staff came up.

The inspection passed off most successfully, and Colonel Wingrave was commended upon the appearance of his troops.

When the Dashton Rifles returned to town that night, Adjutant Holgate dined with the Colonel and his daughter. No mention was made of the handkerchief incident at dinner. The old gentleman related thrilling narratives of the dangers through which they had passed during the war.

Emma was greatly surprised at the sudden and unaccountable familiarity between the two men, and the mystery remained unsolved until after dinner, when she was alone with Wyndham.

"Your father has overcome his scruples about the society."

She looked at him. "Don't tease me," she replied pettishly.

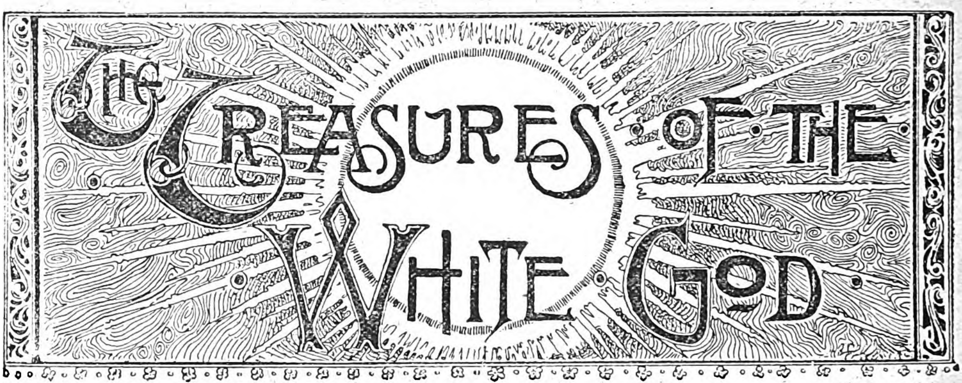
"On my honour, Emma. I bought you," he added enigmatically.

"Bought me?" And her eyes opened in astonishment. "What did you pay for me?"

"The other half of this," he exclaimed laughing, pulling out the piece of silk.

There are occasions on which Wyndham Holgate takes every opportunity of teasing his wife, and he has found from experience, that the readiest means of producing the desired effect is to remind her that he bought her for half a pocket-handkerchief, which is all she is worth.

Ethel Dicey.



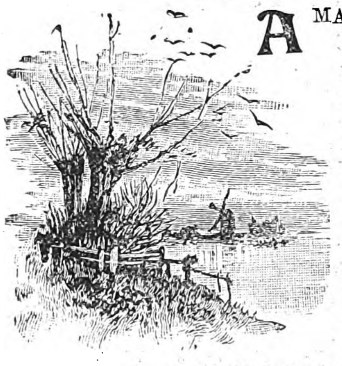
THE TREASURES OF THE WHITE GOD

SUMMARY.

Robert Lane, escaped convict No. 407, is tracked to the World's Fair Grounds at Chicago. He is last seen, after an exciting chase by Mr. Inspector Grey and his assistant, Detective Dean, locked in a burning boat on the lake.

CHAPTER III.

Reward and Roses.



A MAN in a prison is a man in a tomb. A man in a prison, sent there unjustly, is a man buried alive with all the senses, ambitions, and emotions chained to torturing helplessness.

Convict No 407 was a "lifer." For five years he had ceased to have a name, carried from record to record as a machine, a number. Had the warder been asked his original name, research, not memory, could alone have supplied the information.

When he was first brought to the prison this man had interested even the officials. His fine face, manly bearing, the latent fire in his expressive eyes, bespoke the intelligence of a more than ordinary man. The impression soon wore off, however. No. 407 violated two stringent rules of the institution. He constantly demanded the means of communicating with the authorities to investigate his case; he as constantly asserted his innocence, and refused to perform menial labour. In other words he became listed in the class "troublesome."

The dark cell, the solitary, became his regular portion, until, physically wrecked, mentally subjugated, No. 407 gave up the unequal task of battling powerful tyrants, and succumbed, seemingly, to his fate.

One impulse, hidden, secretive, however, haunted every waking moment—the desire, the intense resolve, of escape.

One dark night a quick shot from one of the sentry towers on the outside walls of the prison rang out like a warning note.

Other guards rushing from their posts of duty, saw a wild form scale the massive masonry, drop to the outside world, and disappear in the darkness and gloom of the night, a target for twenty bullets, but running the fearful gauntlet unscathed.

From that moment No. 407 disappeared as effectually as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up. Search was made, rewards were offered, watch was set at every ocean port, and the ordinary avenues of departure from the United States were placarded with a description of the man who for four years had worked silently, patiently, to escape the meshes of the law, and had succeeded.

The details of that escape electrified the reading public, and set the prison officials agog. It must have taken the escaped convict fully a year to secure and prepare the tools with which he cut his way to liberty.

A common case knife had been nicked into the semblance of a file. After a year of incessant night toil, the prisoner had managed to cut out a foot section of one of the strong iron bars of his cell door. A like space of time was devoted to a second bar. These were set back in place, showing no mar or break whatever, by employing small pieces of black cloth as washers. Between the guards' rounds, hourly, No. 407 removed these bars, restored them to place, crept down the cell corridors to an old unused guard tower, forced the door, worked at the outer grated window, returned to his cell, awaited the coming of the guard, repeated the operation, and at the end of four years left his cell for the last time one dark night to make a final dash for the liberty he so craved.

This was the man upon whose trail that eventful June night Mr. Inspector Grey and his trusty assistant had set out. This was the man who, escaping incredible perils in a bold effort at evading arrest, had cut the old boat free, only to find himself penned in by a flame, adrift on an uncertain sea, abandoned finally by his pursuers, who acknowledged in the grim monster, Death, a rival whose clutch was sure and merciless.

No. 407 was dead! An item in the public prints announced it, the electric wire conveyed the intelligence to the prison authorities.

Mr. Inspector Grey gave vent to his disappointment over the loss of the reward and a noted prisoner by sullenly leaving the Exhibition Grounds and hastening to police headquarters to make a report of the exploit of the evening.

The watchman returned to his post of duty.

Only Detective Dean never lost his equilibrium. He doubted not the death of the convict, he doubted not that the holocaust of the lake ended a great chapter in criminal history, but it did not terminate all the issues of the case—*for him*.

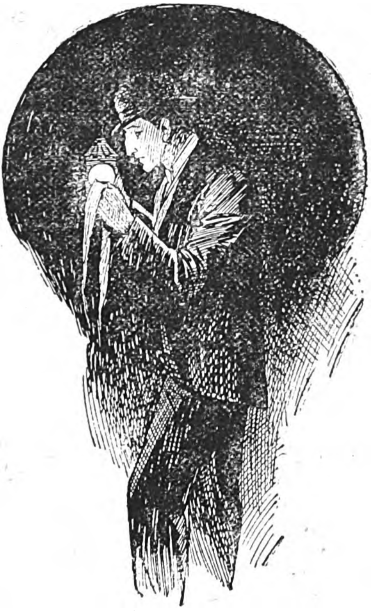
No, Mr. Detective Dean was an indomitable man, and if in his quest for the convict, something besides mere interest in his fate as a police official swayed him, that actuating motive seemed to come to the surface now, as, abandoned by the gruff inspector and the glum watchman, he made his way alone and thoughtfully through the deserted World's Fair grounds.

Dormitory D was his destination. He proceeded straight to the self-same room where the tragic incident of the evening had occurred. Only the noise of snoring broke the stillness.

The keen-eyed, ferret-faced man seemed to have come with a decided purpose in view. He proceeded straight down the dimly lighted avenue between the two rows of compartments, and halted directly in front of one with its broken door hanging from shattered hinges.

This was the room whence Robert Lane, escaped convict No. 407, had made his sudden dash for liberty less than two hours ago—the room into which the inspector had sprung, to find the bird flown and the nest empty.

Detective Dean whipped a dark lantern from his coat as he entered the compartment. It bore evidence of considerable disorder and precipitate flight. A bundle lay under the cot, and this the man of the law seized and inspected. Avidity changed to disappointment, however, as he found it to contain only a suit of working clothes, and although he ransacked every pocket, not even so much as a scrap of paper or a match came to light.



He held in the light of the mask lantern a limp, ragged article.

The man-hunter's brow was drawn in wrinkles of perturbation, his thin lips looked sour and irritated.

"Too bad!" he muttered half audibly. "I had hoped to find some hint, clue, document. Ah! what is this?"

Pawing, shaking, groping over the bedclothes, his hand had suddenly met some object that demanded a new attention. Interest and eager hope flamed back into his eyes, as he held in the light of the mask lantern a limp, ragged article, the name, use, and object of which would have puzzled almost any person.

It was time-worn, time-stained, and, too, it seemed, a time-honoured appendage of the habiliment of the late inmate of the couch. It had two strings running out, each about half a yard, sufficient to encompass a healthy man's waist or chest. Its centre was a pad of woollen folds of cloth, a receptacle for money, a——

"Chest protector, health plaster—I see!" ejaculated Mr. Detective Dean, with sparkling eyes.

He handled the uncouth mass gingerly. A dainty man in his personal habits, there was an innate repugnance to contact with a bundle of rags that had been worn through prison toil, sweat, and uncleanness, for probably five years.

"A clever fellow, this 407," continued the detective in low soliloquy, as meantime he held the cloth article aloft, and with the blade of his penknife began to pick at the matted, hardened threads that fastened it together.

"Here *is* a find—no fear of that! In the hurry of his escape, the convict dropped or forgot it. Through his first arrest in prison, and out of it, by pretending that it was a chest-protector, a strengthening plaster, he has managed to keep on wearing this cloth. Inside of it he has doubtless stowed away the document, the secret, the clue that Richard Sheldon would give ——"

Amid the eagerness, the tense, quivering excitement of the moment, the detective became mute. His eyes dilating, his deft fingers permeated with a slight unsteady tremor, he centred a fascinating attention upon the object at which he was cutting.

Rip—tear! the coarse outer covering was removed. Inside, clean, but creased and compact, lay a canvas packet.

Snip—flap! this in turn was ripped from place, and thrown heedlessly to the floor. The newly-revealed covering was of rubber. A mere incision severed that, so he could tear it apart easily.

Out rolled a minute folded piece of paper—no, parchment. Mr. Detective Dean gasped.

Ah! the sportsman's zest was nothing to this. The precious yellow fragment was in his clutch at last. He unfolded it.

Writing! He glared at it—jargon, undecipherable characters, bewildering conglomeration of topsy turvy lines and curves! What of it? Mr. Detective Dean knew his business. He drew a long breath of relief, of joy irrepressible, of mighty triumph, placed the bit of script inside his watch-case for safe keeping, extinguished his lantern, and smiled!

A far-away smile, a rapt, devoted smile, such a smile as the victor wears when the battle is over, the field won, the rich trophies of nations at his feet!

His step was brisk as he left the room, the building, the World's Fair grounds, in turn. His head was bared, he breasted the rising tempest serenely. Above the sob, the wail, the roar of the wind, ever and anon from his lips some powerful emotion wrung a wild, gloating cry, as if, after many years, the tide had turned, the pursuit of a lifetime had brought at last a golden glowing reward.

Mr. Inspector Grey, seated in his swivel-chair at his office, tugged, toiled, perspired over the formal colourless report of failure complete that must be sent to the chief of police ere morning's light had dawned.

Mr. Detective Dean, seated in his humble room at a third-rate boarding-house, chose its one easy chair, donned slippers and lounging gown with a sigh of luxurious relief, and snuggled down into a nest of happy thoughts.

He chuckled, he rubbed his hands gloatingly, he seemed inspired with but two predominating emotions—rare content, supreme self-satisfaction.

Finally he arose. It was to proceed to a neat antiquated desk in one corner of the room. Thence he took the materials for writing a letter; thence, too, he selected a newspaper. The latter he began to peruse. It was folded across the advertising page, and his eyes became riveted on a thumb-marked item, headed: "For Sale—Country Property."

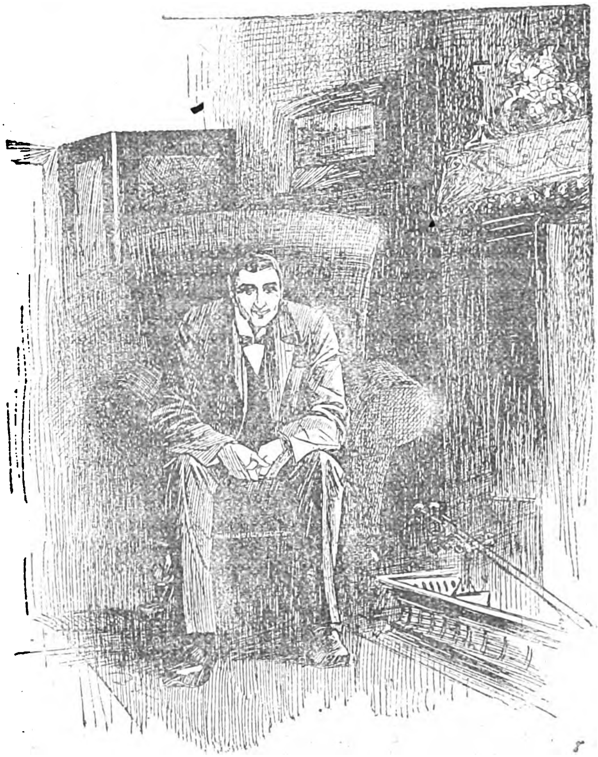
"Five acres," it ran; "modern house of ten rooms, all appliances for health and comfort. Near to station, cheap fare to city, fine lawn and hedge. Four acres in roses of rare variety. A grand chance for a person having a knowledge of flowers to operate a lucrative rose-garden."

Mr. Detective Dean's face expanded as he read. He turned his head, too, with the admiring cynosure of a lover of the beautiful, to a fine lithograph of a bunch of roses hanging over the fireplace, and fully as affectionately to a faded Maréchal Niel drooping from a vase placed on a wall bracket.

"I can smell them now!" he sniffed. "Ah, the beauties! From chasing men to chasing butterflies; from making criminals hunted beasts of prey to raising the delicate, golden-hearted beauties of the garden! How I have waited, and the reward has come! Paradise at last! I'll take the place."

The place was advertised at £2,000. Mr. Detective Dean's open bank-book on the desk showed the paltry balance to his credit of £53 2s.

Yet in a bold, flowing hand he began a letter that announced to the owner of the suburban five-acres that he would take the same; all cash, taxes and assessments, fully paid, that day week.



Snuggled down into a nest of happy thoughts.

Then, his sphinx-like face wearing the same grim smile it had worn since the discovery of the parchment scroll, Mr. Detective Dean wiped away the sweat of an honest man's brow, and going to bed, slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER IV.

For Sale—A Conscience.

The report that Mr. Inspector Grey made of the occurrence at the World's Fair grounds was carried personally by that gentleman to the office of the chief of the city police, and delivered into the hands of that official at the regular morning council of the heads of the force.

He accompanied it with profuse verbal explanations. He was nettled at failure, he dreaded ridicule and contempt, and the chief had a sharp tongue. Before the latter had begun his ordinary diatribe of fault-finding, the inspector had gracefully lifted the burden of censure from his own unwilling shoulders and had transferred it to the broader ones of his assistant, Detective Dean.

"I directed," he explained plausibly; "Dean was counted on to execute. The man slipped him. Twice he had him fairly in his grasp." And convinced and angry, the chief at once dispatched a summons for the culprit, in language not to be misunderstood.

"We cannot afford to dispense with the services of a bright man like Dean," he remarked, "but a dressing down will sharpen his wits."

The censure never came, however. Scarcely had the note been dispatched, when a sealed official envelope was handed to the chief.

It was signed by Detective Dean, and it announced, in formal phraseology, his final and irrevocable resignation from the local detective force.

A surprise to the chief, a "stunner" to the inspector, its perusal left the one cheated of his regular morning scold, the other with suspicious mental queries as to the motive of this strange and sudden freak of the well-known detective.

It was only move one in the programme laid out by the keen-witted officer early that morning—a programme blocked out with the method, precision, and care of an important military campaign.

The man who had abandoned the promises of high official preferment for a five-acre patch of roses, was at that very moment on his way to secure the reward of five years' patience, toil and perseverance.

He was dressed his nattiest, shaven cleanly, and calm and collected. Never was his eye brighter, his nerves more steady of poise, and yet he was starting out to play a game upon which he had staked everything. Upon mere conjecture, the turn of a die, the effect of a word, he had resigned his position, had practically purchased a £2,000 rose garden with less than £60 in available funds, in the power of possession, earning, or borrowing.

He did not pause in his brisk walk until he had reached that portion of the city where the best residences were grouped. There was one more pretentious than its neighbours, showy, modern, and surrounded by tasty gardens. Detective Dean ascended its marble steps jauntily. The outer massive door bore a name—"Richard Sheldon."

A servant admitted him, took his card, ushered him into a richly-furnished library, and departed to learn the pleasure of the owner of all this royal magnificence.

A heavy, rapid step sounded in the hall a minute later. A man of middle age entered the room, an eager expression in his eyes.

Those eyes were at their best just now, quite natural and human like, thrown off guard by some overpowering emotion, but bad eyes—false eyes in every respect—the lurking, sinister measure of hypocrisy and cunning in their dark depths plainly showed.

"Mr. Sheldon," murmured Dean, arising, precise and formal, as a master of deportment.

The nodding master of the house flung himself into an arm-chair, and fixed an anxious, penetrating glance on his visitor.

"Come!" he said sharply; "you have news."

"Of importance!"

"Concerning the escaped convict?"

"Yes."

"Don't keep me on nettles!"

"Very good. We traced him — Robert Lane, 407; cornered him."

"Where?"

"At the World's Fair grounds."

Sheldon started violently, seemed on the point of saying something, and then, tapping his fingers on the arm of his chair, remarked simply:

"Go on."

"We cornered him; he slipped us; got locked into the hold of an old barge; the craft took fire. He is dead."

"Dead!"

Richard Sheldon turned white to the lips. His great claw-like fingers were passed over his swarthy sinister face in an aimless, uncertain way.

"Yes, fire and water have left not a trace."

"And the man—you remember what I told you—you recall the importance of gaining information——"

He was dressed his nattiest.

The man's tones were feverishly eager. His quivering soul hung on the reply of his visitor.

"Hold on," spoke the latter, his manner changing suddenly, something mandatory, imperious, coming into tone and face. "Let us go back."

"To what?" demanded his host vaguely.

"To the beginning, to a starting point, to a proper mutual, perfect understanding of the vital issues of the case in hand. For five years you have employed me on secret missions, off and on. Recently entire personal efforts have been devoted to tracing down this man—this Englishman—Adrian Burgoyne."

Again Richard Sheldon paled and started and glared nervously about him.

"Don't speak that name here aloud!" he said.

"Why not? It is his right name," responded Dean almost aggressively.

"I know, I know; but as 407, as Robert Lane, he has lived and died. No need reviving dead issues. I engaged you to try and secure from the convict a secret I feared he possessed. That failing, I demanded his incarceration, his safe keeping."

"Why?"

Clear as a clarion note rang forth the abrupt query.

Richard Sheldon frowned darkly.

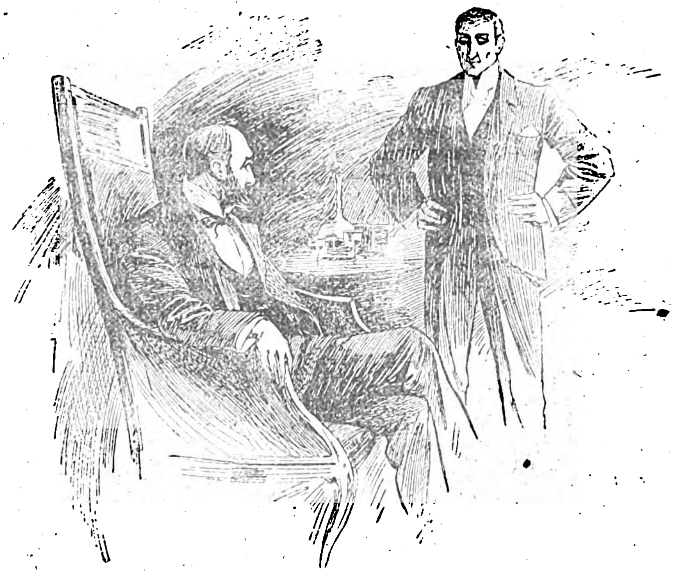
"That," he remarked chillingly, "is my secret."

"And mine, also."

"Eh?"

Blankly staring at the face of the man he had hitherto employed and treated as a servant, Sheldon read there something of the latent menace of a master.

"I know all," pursued the detective glibly. "Knowing all, I am prepared to profit by it. I have resigned my position as a detective. I have purchased a rose-garden. Roses are my hobby. All I need is the means to secure the purchase."



Sheldon started violently.

Mr. Richard Sheldon quailed before the clear, unwavering magnetism of his visitor's resolute eye.

"How—how much?" he stammered.

"A mere trifle to you, a bagatelle, a matter of two thousand pounds. Wait, sir. I had better talk. I never blackmail a client. I never compound a felony. Had I found 407 alive I might have gone to him instead of you. He, being dead, leaving me in possession of valuable information, I offer it to the highest cash bidder. I assume you to be an anxious purchaser."

From beneath his bristling, bushy eyebrows, Sheldon viewed his visitor. The mask was down now. The detective's motives and intentions were laid bare.

"In following out this case," proceeded Dean, in the same even, imperturbable tones, "I stumbled over several strange and suspicious discoveries. Shall I detail them?"

"Your surmises?"

"I have none," interrupted Dean promptly. "I never surmise. I deal only in facts. I first learnt that this young Englishman, Adrian——"

"407, you mean."

Dean shrugged his shoulders.

"As you like," he assented lightly—"came to this city some five years ago, with an introduction and a message for you. A month later he was decoyed to a meeting of some anarchists."

"Decoyed?" insinuated Sheldon with emphasis.

"I am satisfied of it; I am certain a plot was laid—the result, the murder of a striking iron-moulder; one arrest under a false name—No. 407. He was convicted, his case rushed through. A man named Colonel Lytle was active in the prosecution. I have since learned that he is your right-hand man. All this was done with a motive. No, Mr. Richard Sheldon," went on Dean, waving his hand imperiously, "don't interrupt me, don't dispute me, don't try the highly-indignant dodge. I deal in facts. If you are not willing to heed their import, I shall take them to the superintendent of police."

"You can prove nothing," hissed his pale and quivering host through his set teeth.

"Investigation might," returned Dean confidently. "Having left the force, I have no desire to delve into the past history of a dead convict, nor the motives that led you to persecute him, hound him down, drive him to his death."

"Hard words these," growled the man at the desk.

"True ones. Seeking a reason for your interest in No. 407, I found it. His life was nothing to you, his death comparatively a matter of indifference; but his silence—that you secured. You sealed his lips, you disarmed him from molesting you, but he defeated your plans in one particular. There was information you desired to secure from him. Did you obtain it? No. There was a clue, a mystery, a secret, a document, that you craved."

"And his secret died with him," muttered Sheldon.

"Perhaps not," the detective coolly replied.

"What!"

The detective waved his host back, as, under a hopeful strain of the intensest excitement, the latter arose to his feet.

"I can be terse, plain," he spoke briefly. "I have found a document that the convict has evidently carried about him, treasured, guarded for years."

"Give it me!"

Trembling all over, Richard Sheldon extended a mandatory hand.

"Wait," interrupted Dean. "My terms are plain. Just glance over that."

He tossed upon the desk the self-same rose-garden advertisement over which he had gloated in his room early that morning. He had cut it out and pasted it on a blank sheet of paper.

With scowling brows Sheldon perused it. His lips knitted, his fingers twitched, some mighty battle raged within him. Finally he looked up.

"Two thousand pounds is a big sum," he grunted out.

"It depends," placidly supplemented Dean.

"I am to understand that the amount liquidates all claim for past professional services on your part?"

The detective nodded affirmatively.

"It secures, furthermore, your perpetual silence regarding what you may now know, or later learn?"

"Yes."

"And upon its payment, you transfer to me the secret—"

"Document, call it," interrupted Dean.

"Document, then. You surrender that to me. Have you read it?"

"Not I."

"I agree to your terms."

Richard Sheldon wheeled in his pivot chair so as to force the desk before him.

From a compartment he drew a cheque book, tore out a blank, and began:

"Two thousand—wait! Your full initials?"

"Berwyn L."

"Berwyn L."

"Berwyn L. Dean—two thousand pounds. Now then, the document."

Mr. Detective Dean inspected and folded the cheque. There was placid satisfaction in his heart, a glowing smile on his face, a marked contrast to the eager, selfish look that traversed that of Sheldon.

"Come!" iterated the latter almost fiercely, "don't keep me on tenter-hooks. The document!"

Dean sprung back the case of his watch. From its safe receptacle he drew the tiny, folded bit of parchment that he had secured after so much trouble, in Dormitory D. at the World's Fair grounds.

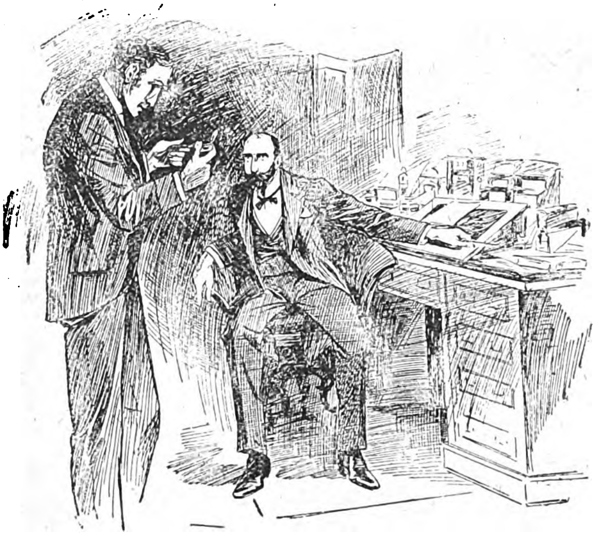
"I found this accidentally," he explained. "Valuable or not, it was evidently treasured by Convict 407. It was all he left behind him."

He handed it to Sheldon. The latter tore it from his grasp like a starving wolf ravenous for food within its sight. For the moment the man's true character flashed to the surface completely, and he was transformed.

Watching that fierce, wicked face, the detective sighed.

"A big mystery under all this," he murmured. "I wonder if elucidating it would not, after all, have gratified my professional pride more than raising roses will the rural instincts of my nature?"

Twice he spoke to Sheldon, but the latter never heeded him. Apparently impervious to all extraneous surroundings, the man had torn open the bit of yellow parchment, and, smoothing it out before him, sat staring at it, devouring it with rapt though puzzled gaze.

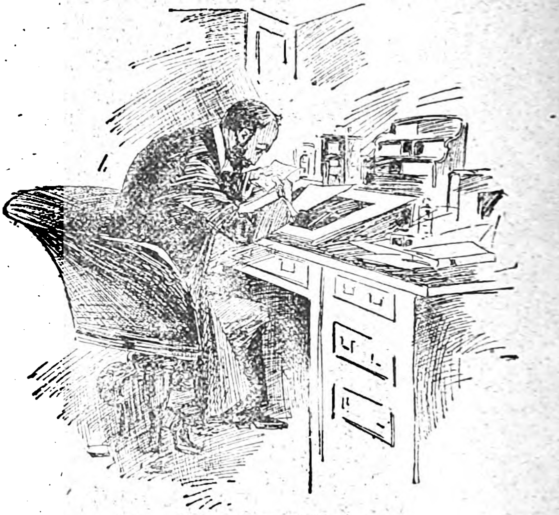


Dean sprung back the case of his watch.

The detective left the room. His work was done, the reward of honest labour reposed in his inside breast pocket—the garden of roses was his!

The transaction was completed. Mr. Detective Dean had gone through ten years of service as a police officer, and his reputation had never suffered a particle.

But Mr. Detective Dean had his price, and had been paid it. Between the trouble of clearing the character of an obscure convict from the stain of guilt, and fleecing an unscrupulous rogue out of a small share of his large ill-gotten gains, the detective bartered his soul, and chose the latter course.



Sat staring at it.

After all—he put this final quietus on the upbraidings of conscience—Convict 407 might not be innocent; after all, what was a human life among the many sunk in darkness?

But let us see how differently, in the end, was Convict 407 judged by Mr. Detective Dean, twelve intelligent jurymen, and by the angels of God in Heaven.

(To be continued.)

Home Notes THREEPENCE.
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ALCOHOLISM AND OBESITY.

It is often rashly asserted that drunkenness is uncommon on the European Continent, and that, in particular, it is a rare vice in France. Certain medical therapeutists and specialistic scientists have, however, recently furnished some suggestive statistics which flatly contradict the cherished beliefs of those who have persistently proclaimed the sobriety of the French people. Dr. Lancereaux, at the French Academy of Medicine, having made a special study of the subject, declares that in his extensive hospital practice out of twenty patients ten are, on an average, suffering from some form of alcoholic poisoning—women being responsible for a large proportion of the enormous consumption of alcohol thus indicated. The learned doctor sums up the results on the population at large as representing a mortality greater than that caused by the greatest epidemics, the ruin of labour, and—what is already startlingly evident in France—the steady diminution of the very population of the country. Other authorities, again, assert that with the annual increase in the consumption of spirits, to the extent of nearly 500,000 gallons in various liquors, there has been a corresponding increase of corpulence. This appears to make alcohol responsible for the troublesome and sometimes dangerous increase of unhealthy adispose tissue on the strength of the somewhat slipshod theory of the affinity of alcohol for oxygen in the system. It is certainly worthy of note that some of the most eminent authorities on the Continent and in America absolutely debar the corpulent from drinking alcohol in any shape or form, while on the other hand one of the most prominent and successful specialists in England boldly and flatly contradicts, on this point, his professional brethren. He permits those undergoing his treatment to drink the spirits of their choice—although he does not advocate the use of these beverages. The result of his experiments is that he can reduce a person's weight from 3lb. to 6lb. in a week, although the patient may drink alcohol even to excess; nor will any extra decrease in weight be experienced by a restriction of the amount of drink consumed. His aim is to attack corpulence at its very root, and to achieve this he does not approve of such a drastic measure as the sudden and indiscriminate stoppage of a person's accustomed spirituous drink; for there are many who have so habitually used themselves to their "dram" that its prohibition is unquestionably a great hardship, if not actually dangerous. Again, he takes exception to the action of the majority of specialists in dealing with obesity, in prescribing a limited diet. To this he takes exception on the very reasonable ground (to quote from his clever 256-paged book, entitled "Corpulency, and the Cure," by F. C. Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.), that with the reduction of fat by his process, the most unhealthy portion of this excess tissue, such as those which clog the vital organs, begin to waste first, and, as a consequence, the entire system becomes healthier within the first twenty-four hours of the treatment. Then immediately the patient begins to be exhilarated by such symptoms as the freedom of breathing, the stronger and steadier action of the heart, the feeling of lightness, the absence of the sense of oppression—each organ performing its duty with increased regularity. He finds himself aroused suddenly from a lethargic heaviness and morbid drowsiness which have probably lasted for years; he feels, as it were, born anew, and instantly becomes more active and buoyant, both in body and mind—all of which pleasurable sensations are naturally accompanied by an increase of appetite. It is not necessary to be a scientist or a medical expert to adopt the common sense view of these matters. "Would you, then," argues Mr. Russell, "in the case of a person who for years, perhaps, has never known what a healthy appetite means, deprive him of food when Nature appealingly holds forth her hands, literally begging for it? No! those who reduce fat by starvation pay for their folly at usurers' interest when meeting the bills drawn against them on the Bank of Longevity. Let other specialists prescribe this; I will not countenance it," says Mr. Russell. Notwithstanding the increased amount of food taken daily, the weight, under the operation of his system, is steadily reduced, to which unerring testimony is given by the weighing-machine. The painstaking research and the marvellous success of the author of the above-named work justify us in arriving at the conclusion that his system may be followed with absolute confidence. His success is all the more remarkable because the whole secret consists in the use of a few herbal roots and a simple vegetable acid. We believe it is the only system of reducing obesity--and it is a very pleasant system—which is certain in its results and brings no after-penalties. We commend his book to our readers. It may be obtained post free by sending six penny stamps to Mr. Russell at the address already given.—*Brighton Examiner*, August 9th, 1895.

THE FIRST GRAND 'PIONEER' REDUCTION SALE

By Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, the Well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds.
TO THE INFLUENTIAL READERS OF *Short Stories*, AND MAY NOT APPEAR AGAIN.

This is the first announcement of a Reduction in the price of our manufactures for ten long years, and is of great importance to parties furnishing.

The "Queen's Royal" Household Carpets and Hearthrugs are extolled by all the Nations of the Earth.

Gigantic Sale of the "Queen's Royal" Household

Sale Price 2/- HEARTHRUGS (Reg.) **Sale Price 2/-**

IN REVERSIBLE RICH TURKEY PATTERNS, measuring 6ft. long and 3ft. wide. These HEARTHRUGS have gained a world-wide reputation for MAGNIFICENCE, CHEAPNESS, and UTILITY, having no equal. Registered New Designs, and considered Works of Art. Thousands of Repeat Orders and Testimonials received, giving the highest satisfaction.

SPECIAL OFFER.—Three for 5s. 9d., Six for 11s. 3d., Twelve for 22s.

The "Queen's Royal" Household Carpets and Hearthrugs are patronised by Royalty, Nobility, and Clergy from all parts of the Empire.

Gigantic Sale of the "Queen's Royal" Household Reversible Rich Turkey Pattern

Trade Mark on all Goods. Beware of Imitations. CARPETS (Reg.) *Trade Mark on all Goods. Beware of Imitations.*

Admittedly the Cheapest in the World. *Woven without seam. Altogether superior quality, with handsome border to correspond. A marvel for excellence and beauty. Thousands of repeat orders and Testimonials received, giving the highest satisfaction. When Ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.*

	Sale Price.		Sale Price.
6ft. by 9ft.	9/6	10½ft. by 12ft.	20/6
8ft. by 9ft.	11/6	12ft. by 12ft.	22/6
6ft. by 12ft.	12/6	9ft. by 15ft.	21/6
9ft. by 9ft.	13/6	12ft. by 13½ft.	25/6
9ft. by 10½ft.	15/6	12ft. by 15ft.	28/6
9ft. by 12ft.	17/6	12ft. by 18ft.	33/6
9ft. by 13½ft.	19/6	12ft. by 21ft.	38/6

Colossal Sale of Rich Velvet Pile Real Brussels

Sale Price 6/6 HEARTHRUGS **Sale Price 6/6**

In rich Oriental and Indian Art Designs, measuring 6ft. by 3ft., which for price, real value, weight, and richness of manufacture will be found unapproachable.

SPECIAL OFFER.—Three Rugs, 19s.; Six for 37s.

Melville Castle, Glasswade, Midlothian, June 1st.—The Right Honourable the VISCOUNTESS MELVILLE writes: "I am very pleased with the 'Royal' Velvet Hearthrugs to hand, and would like four more Hearthrugs. Her ladyship would also like two Velvet Carpets at 39s., one ditto 60s. 6d., to match them. Cheque £8 14s. inclosed."

COLOSSAL SALE OF RICH VELVET PILE

REAL BRUSSELS CARPETS

Extraordinarily Heavy, very Best Quality, Newest and Choicest Designs. In Old Gold, Sultan, Terra Cotta, Crimson, Sky, Navy, and the latest colours. With handsome border to correspond. Guaranteed to wear for years and give every satisfaction. The sizes and prices as follows (all ready for putting down):

REDUCED SALE PRICE LIST.

4½ft. by 7ft.,	**11/-**	VELVET PILE, BRUSSELS CARPET SQUARES.	9ft. by 12ft.,	**38/-**
6ft. by 9ft.,	**18/-**		11ft. by 12ft.,	**47/-**
7½ft. by 9ft.,	**23/-**		12ft. by 13½ft.,	**59/-**
9ft. by 9ft.,	**28/-**		12ft. by 16ft.,	**69/-**
9ft. by 10½ft.,	**33/-**		12ft. by 18ft.,	**77/-**

Altogether superior quality, with handsome border to correspond. A marvel of excellence and beauty. Thousands of repeat orders and testimonials received, giving the highest satisfaction. When ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

H.R.H. Prince L. of Battenberg.
H.R.H. Prince K. Bigit, Siam.
Marquis of Breadalbane.
Marquise de Biddle Cope.
Lord Farnham.
Lord Henry Fitzgerald.
Lord Lee.
Sir Henry de Bathe.
Sir Henry Bellingham.
Sir E. H. Blair, Bart.
Sir L. Lacon.
Sir B. Cayley.
Archbishop of York.
Bishop of Capetown.

TO READERS OF *SHORT STORIES* ONLY.

SAVE ALL INTERMEDIATE PROFITS.

Special Sale of REVERSIBLE WOVEN ANTIQUE REAL INDIAN PATTERN.

Sale Price **9/-** Each.

CARPETS.

IN LATEST STYLE. These CARPETS are suitable for covering any room; they are exactly 9ft. square, and blended in the RICHEST and MOST CHASTE DESIGNS we have ever offered at the price. They can be had to suit any assemblage of furniture.

In ordering state if dark or light Ground preferred.

H.I.H. Eugenie de Christoforo.
Princess Palœologœ Nicephorœ Commenœ.
Princess De Croy.
Dowager Marchioness Londonderry.
Dowager Marchioness Downshire.
Duchess of Wellington.
Duchess of Richmond.
Marchioness of Breadalbane.
Marchioness of Hastings
Marchioness of Drogheda.
Marchioness of Bute.
Countess Dowager Lady Thomas.
Countess Dowager of Morton.

REMARKS.—A lady customer writes complaining that we send out too large a carpet for the money. Be this so or not, we send out no Carpet measuring less than 6ft. by 9ft.—even for 3s. 6d.

TEST THEM. THEY WILL SURPRISE YOU.

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE (CHANCERY DIVISION), HODGSON v. WEBB BROTHERS.—On the 18th day of July, 1890, his lordship Mr. Justice Chitty granted an interim injunction, restraining Messrs. Webb Brothers of Hackney Wick, from infringing Mr. Fredk. Hodgson's Trade Mark "Eclipse," No. 93,774 (Leeds).

EXTRAORDINARY REDUCTIONS.

100,000 'ECLIPSE' CARPETS (Regd.)

GUARANTEED GENUINE BARGAINS.

Sale Price 3/6 Each. **Sale Price 3/6 Each.**

This Gigantic Offer is a Special Contract, made with readers of *Short Stories* only. We will forward direct from the looms to any address on receipt of amount, A GENUINE WOVEN, SEAMLESS, REVERSIBLE CARPET, the largest ever sold at the price. Suitable for Sitting-room or Bedroom, Bordered and Woven in Art Colours, large enough to cover any ordinary-sized room, as an advertisement for our goods, thus saving any Middle Profits. Remember these are Woven, not Printed, and are made of a material almost equal to Wool. Thousands of these Carpets and Rugs have already been sold at almost double above prices. An "Eclipse" Rug sent with Carpet 1/- extra.

KILKEA CASTLE, MAGENY, Co. KILDARE, 17th August, 1894. LADY EVA FITZGERALD writes: "The 'Eclipse' Carpets supplied by Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son—her ladyship is much pleased with them."

SPECIAL OFFER.

Two Carpets and Two Rugs 8/-, or Four Carpets and Four Rugs 15/6.

Value unequalled in the Annals of Advertising. As a favour, kindly Examine and Compare these Carpets.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED. Do not miss this opportunity. It may not occur again.

"SHORT STORIES" CARPET COUPON, 14/12/95.

On receipt of this Coupon and P.O. or Stamps for amount, we guarantee to send any goods as above to your address in any part of the United Kingdom. (Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

Cash returned in full if not satisfied.

PRODIGIOUS SALE OF THE "PRUDENTIAL"

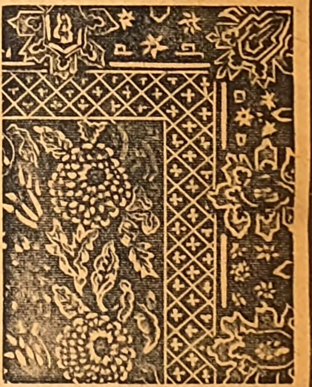
REVERSIBLE CARPETS (Regd.)

Reversible, woven throughout with handsome border to correspond; richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. Made in 10 sizes only. These carpets are the production of much care, labour, and forethought, and are made in handsome and elaborate patterns (which are protected by registration). They combine the rich blended colours of the Turkish and Persian with the elegant designs of the Wilton. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down, and cannot be excelled in durability.

Size.	Reduced Sale Price. Each.
6ft. by 9ft.	5/6
7½ft. by 9ft.	7/6
9ft. by 9ft.	8/6
9ft. by 10½ft.	9/6
9ft. by 12ft.	11/6
10½ft. by 12ft.	13/6
12ft. by 12ft.	15/6
12ft. by 13½ft.	17/6
12ft. by 15ft.	19/6
12ft. by 18ft.	24/0

When ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

Blairquhan, Maybole, N.B., August 3rd, 1894.—Lady Hunter Blair writes: "Will Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son send her another 'Prudential' Carpet, same as before, crimson and gold, dimensions 9ft. by 10½ft. Cheque inclosed."



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A Reversible Prudential Hearthrug (Regd.), to match above Carpets, sent for 1/6 extra, size 2yds. long and 1yd. wide. Special Offer, Three Hearthrugs for 4/3, or Six for 8s., or Twelve for 15/6, sterling value.

We Rely upon the Spontaneous Repeat Orders from our Clients for the Maintenance of our Trade. Established nearly a Quarter of a Century.

All orders dispatched same day in rotation as they arrive by post.

Cheques and P.O.'s payable to

F. HODGSON & SON, MANUFACTURERS, IMPORTERS, AND MERCHANTS, **WOODSLEY ROAD, LEEDS.**

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS: "ECLIPSE, LEEDS." N.B.—Foreign Orders executed and packed free, and shipped at lowest rates.

A NEW SERIAL STORY STARTS NEXT

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 364. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 21ST, 1895. [ONE PENNY.

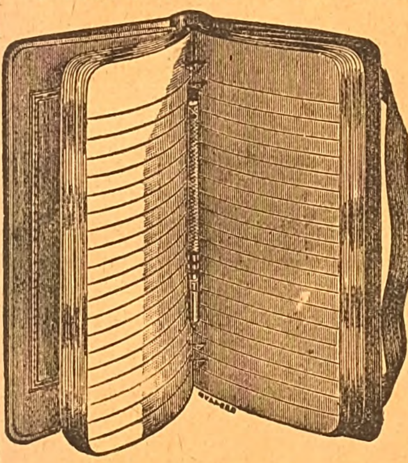
PROVERBS TO BE DOTTED DOWN.

Better do a thing than wish it done.
Well, buy a box of **BEECHAM'S PILLS**, don't wish it bought.
Eat not to dulness.
But if by chance you should, take **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
Excess calls in the doctor.
But **BEECHAM'S PILLS** stop him.
Have always a ready mouth for a ripe cherry.
And **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
Second trials often succeed.
BEECHAM'S PILLS succeed first time.
Punctuality begets confidence.
So do **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
It is good to begin well, better to finish well.
BEECHAM'S PILLS do both.
Little strokes fell great oaks.
And **BEECHAM'S PILLS** cure big ills.
Light suppers make long lives.
So do **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
Strive to learn from all things.
BEECHAM'S PILLS especially.
Once a use and ever a custom.
After one trial of **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
Home is home, be it ever so humble.
But the humblest must have a box of **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
Great souls have great wills.
Great men insist on **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
In an orderly house all is soon ready.
And a box of **BEECHAM'S PILLS** handy if needed.
A man without reason is one without season.
When he won't take **BEECHAM'S PILLS.**
A disease known is half cured.
BEECHAM'S PILLS do the other half.
Better have some of a pudding than none of a pie.
But **BEECHAM'S PILLS** are often handy after both.
Observation is the best teacher.
Then observe this, "**BEECHAM'S PILLS ARE WORTH A GUINEA A BOX.**"
Xcellence is the reward of merit.
That is the reason **BEECHAM'S PILLS** have attained such wide-spread popularity.

Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

COLLINS' "AYE, READY!" NOTE-BOOK.

WITH PATENT "SELF-REGISTER."



THE HANDIEST AND THE BEST. THE SIMPLEST AND THE CHEAPEST.

As will be seen from the Illustration, this Note-Book has a hollow "rest" cut into the back, into which the Pencil falls and is securely held, while by means of an ingenious contrivance called a "Self-Register," the person using the Book can at once open it where he was last writing. A reference to any page in the front, the middle, or the end is also materially assisted by the "Self-Register."

In Leather Bindings, Round Corners, Gilt Edges, from 1s. upwards, or with Re-fills from 3s. 6d. to 10s. 6d.

WM. COLLINS, SONS & CO., LIMITED,
Bridewell Place, London, E.C.;
139, Stirling Road, Glasgow.

MRS. JACKSON

An artist's wife, residing at Norton, near Malton, Yorks, states: "I am extremely grateful to you for the good received through taking your Wind Pills. For a long time I suffered severely from

INDIGESTION, SPASMS,

and **LIVER COMPLAINT**. The doctors gave me up as incurable, nor did I think it possible for me to recover. I scarcely dared to eat any food, fearing suffocation. Seeing an advertisement of

Page Woodcock's Wind Pills,

I resolved to try them. After taking a few small boxes, I lost all the painful symptoms, and now enjoy good health. I feel I owe my life to you. Publish my statement as you please."

All sufferers from INDIGESTION,
LIVER COMPLAINTS,
WIND on the STOMACH,
SICK HEADACHE, NERVOUS DEBILITY,
PALPITATION of the HEART,
BILIOUSNESS, &c.,

should avail themselves of this most excellent medicine.

The Wind Pills are purely Vegetable, Tasteless, Mild, and Tonic; and may be taken with perfect safety by the most delicate of either sex.

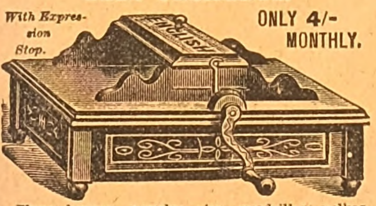
Of all Medicine Vendors, at **1s. 1½d.** and **2s. 9d.**

THE "ENGLISH ORGANETTE."

EASY PAYMENTS.

With Expression Stop.

ONLY 4/- MONTHLY.



Plays hymns, popular airs, quadrilles, polkas, waltzes, horn-pipes, etc.; any tune can be played with artistic effect by anyone. **A mere child can play it. Most Marvellous Musical Instrument in the World. PRICE 30s.**

TERMS: 4s. Deposit and 4s. Monthly.
Organette delivered when first 4s. is paid.

NOTICE.—To each of my Customers **I GIVE FREE** my Noted Book of Coupons, value 30s. and upwards. This is something new, and surprises everyone.
Write for list of music, and full particulars.
(Mention this paper.)

J. M. DRAPER, Organette Works, Blackburn.

JANUARY 2...	... ...	£8 per cent.
Feb. 1...	... ...	6 „ „
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Total for 12 months ...£92 per cent.
An average of nearly £8 per cent. per month.

IF interested in how a LEGITIMATE investment, WITHOUT SPECULATION, can be made to yield this return, write for our Illustrated Manual, post free. We have not a dissatisfied client, no money has ever been lost, and £5 and upwards may be invested. Cheques for profits mailed promptly 1st of each month. DOUGLAS, HUNGERFORD & WILLIAMS, 5, Copthall Buildings, Copthall Avenue, E.C., London, and 11, Place de la Bourse, 11, Paris.

£10,000 IN PRESENTS.

1/- ONLY — ONE MILLION BEST SILK HANDKERCHIEFS — 1/- ONLY

I must clear my overstock of about one million pure Silk Handkerchiefs, direct from the looms. To do this quickly I will give to each of the first 100,000 postal customers a valuable present; please mention if a lady's or gentleman's prize is required. The Handkerchiefs are of large sizes, and well worth 2s. 6d. each. Suitable for Ladies' or Gentlemen's wear. **LIGHT, SOFT, WARM, and DURABLE**, as only a Silk Handkerchief can be. I have reduced the price for the Special Sale to **1s.** each, or 13 stamps; 2 lots for **2s.**, 3 for **5s.**, 12 for **9s. 6d.** Prize with each Handkerchief.

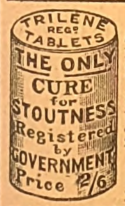
A Live Testimonial, worth a Thousand Recommendations from me.

"Boundry Lane, Liverpool, Mar. 16th, 1895.
"Dear Sir,—Sample Handkerchief and present to hand this morning, with which I am both exceedingly pleased and absolutely astounded at the price you are putting them in at. You are worthy of patronage. With all possible despatch please forward me to above address 14 more as follows: 10 Ladies' and 4 Gentlemen's. Enclosed you will find P.O.O.'s as per your quotation, 11s. 6d. Sincerely hoping you may have an extensive sale of the Handkerchiefs—Yours faithfully, JOHN D. COSTA."

P.O.O.'s payable at Rugby. Letters addressed to
H. BUTCHER, Clifton Mill, Rugby.
PLEASE MENTION THIS PAPER.

BLUSHING

Permanently cured. A Pamphlet giving sound practical advice and particulars of a successful treatment for a rapid, simple, and inexpensive home-cure, forwarded free to all upon receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—Prof. B. L. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.



ALL FAT PEOPLE

Readily **Reduce Weight** and **Cure Corpulency Permanently** by taking **TRILENE TABLETS** (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are very agreeable, harmless, and never fail to PRESERVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of diet. **Reduction begins immediately.**

An English Countess writes: "*Your Trilene Tablets act admirably.*" Send 2/6 to THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.

HAIR DESTROYED

permanently and absolutely by an entirely new and harmless self-treatment, total destruction guaranteed. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope. Prof. F. T. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

MY SELECTION.

3s. worth of Lovely Christmas and New Year's Cards, Newest Designs, upon receipt of 1/3 Stamps or P.O. Two Packets, 2/3. *Money returned if not satisfied.*

F. LIMBREY, Stationer, DUNSTABLE.

VIOLIN STRINGS.

4 Best "E's" (samples) 9d., post free.

S. S. CARY, NEWBURY.

TOO STOUT

Dr. Grey's **FAT REDUCING** Pills.

A safe, rapid, and permanent reduction and improvement in health and **breathing** guaranteed. A special preparation kept for stubborn cases (either sex) which have resisted other treatment.
ABDOMINAL OBESITY A SPECIALTY.
2/9 and **4/6** per box, plain wrapper, post free to all parts.
Dr. O. GREY, 57, Weymouth St., Portland Pl., London, W.

HAIR DESTROYED.

A lady who has permanently destroyed Superfluous Hairs on herself, will be happy to forward free, to all similarly afflicted, full particulars of a simple, inexpensive and harmless self-treatment. Send stamped addressed envelope in confidence to Mrs. "T. D.," 87, Strand, London.

Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Edited by C. Arthur Pearson of Pearson's Weekly

SHORT STORIES

No. 364.] For the Week ending December 21st, 1895. [One Penny.

AN ENGAGEMENT RING.

ARTHUR DUNSTAN was deeply in love with one of two young women. Whether that one was Miss Eugenia Marlowe or Miss Clara Santley was the question which was making an imbecile of him. It may be hard to love in vain, but even this lacks the harrowing features of feeling that one loves but knows not whom. Dunstan was very fair in his distribution of favours, averaging three calls a week upon each of the young women. He vacillated between the two magnets as regularly as the swing of a clock pendulum.

For three years affairs had run on after this fashion. In the meantime, Society had busied itself, at calls and afternoon teas, in wondering which young woman Mr. Dunstan really preferred, or in substantiating the prophecies of experienced dames who said he had no thought of being anything else than a good-natured bachelor during the remainder of his natural life. These social wiseacres had no inkling of the war which was going on in the much-to-be-desired-heart of this son of a millionaire banker.

Fortune favours the patient as well as the brave, sometimes. Late one afternoon, while Arthur was sitting at his desk, dreamily listening to the click-click of the typewriter, as quickly, as deftly as an inspiration comes to a poet, the realisation came to him that it was Miss Santley whom he loved. Yes, he loved her madly, and life would be unbearable to him until he knew that she returned his affection. Within three minutes he was roundly rating himself for not having known from the first that Clara was in every way the more lovable lady of the puzzling pair.

When that same evening this beautiful young lady said softly: "Yes," and he held her close to his heart, he realised what a blessed thing it is to own completely the affection of a woman you love—and to know that she the right one.

"Are you very sure, Arthur, that you do not care more for Miss Marlowe?" she asked, and then added, before he had time to answer: "She is a very pretty girl, you know."

"Yes. Very sure. This is the happiest moment in all my life. I wish I had something to give you as a token of remembrance." He looked down at his clothes as if in search of something, but nothing offered itself.

"Here, take this!" She drew from her finger a ring and held it out towards him. It was a sapphire of old-fashioned design. "It's an heirloom of the family. You may keep it until you bring me another."

She seized his hand and tried nervously to put it on his little finger. It was too small, however, and would barely pass the first joint.

She stepped back a little way and surveyed him with admiration.

"My, what a big fellow you are! You shall not spoil my plan, though."

After fingering in his vest pocket an unreasonably long time she succeeded in bringing out his watch, and, after she had unhooked the chain, she slipped the ring upon it.

"There, now, I hope I shall always have you so secure." She stood apart from him again and looked at him with a smile.

"You shall," he answered chivalrously, happily.

"Don't forget that the affair at Tappersley's is to-morrow night. Come early," she said, as they parted at the door.

As she hurried up to her room with light step she was so happy that she wished she might herald the fact of her engagement to all of the gay people who would assemble at Mrs. Tappersley's the next evening.

Mr. Dunstan was sitting in his office at precisely the same hour that he had discovered the identity of his sweetheart on the afternoon previous, when he unconsciously ran his finger along his watch chain and found that something which ought to be there was missing. He looked—the ring was gone. He suddenly became greatly excited. He fumbled among his papers with nervous

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fingers, pulled out every drawer in his desk and scraped underneath it with his ruler.

"Beggs, have you seen a ring—a sapphire ring of old-fashioned design—about here?" Beggs said that he had not, and he was very sorry. Then every clerk in the office was questioned until his father came very near precipitating a fatal attack of heart disease, because the business of the office was interrupted by what he considered a very trivial occurrence.

"I must have left it in my room," Dunstan thought as he made for a cab. "Probably I took it off when I changed from one vest to another."

Great drops of perspiration stood on Arthur's forehead as he sat down for a moment's rest, puffing madly at a cigar. Collars, cuffs, and articles of men's wearing apparel were distributed over the floor. The ring! Where was it? He looked at the broken *bric-à-brac* and puffed harder at his cigar. One servant had been insulted with accusations and another compelled to three times sift over all the ashes in the bin, without avail.

Dunstan knew how highly Miss Santley valued the ring. It was a relic of the Santley family's history, a history of which she was very proud. A family history was something that Miss Marlowe did not possess, although her father had spent much of the money he had made in mining to cover up the absence. Naturally Miss Marlowe was envious of her rival's heirloom, an equal of which she did not possess.

"Lost or stolen," Dunstan concluded, was the last resort. He drove to the nearest police station at once and left a complete description of the ring. Then he fashioned an advertisement for the morning papers which read after this fashion:

"Lost—A gold ring, sapphire setting, antique design. Finder will be rewarded with £100 and no questions asked."

This notice he placed in all the papers save one, which he knew that her father read as regularly every morning as he ate his breakfast. His sweetheart probably did not read the morning papers, but if she should happen to see his little advertisement he felt that she could not fail to recognise the property in question, and then he would be irretrievably lost. What would she or any other girl think of a lover who was so careless as to lose a token of her love and confidence within twenty-four hours after they had become engaged?

About the same time in the late afternoon that Mr. Arthur Dunstan was passing in his notice at one of the little offices which receives "ads" for all the papers Mr. Walter Gibson was sauntering along Regent Street. The important business of selecting an engagement ring had been occupying his attention since luncheon. He was returning to his apartments without one, simply because in all the costly array of rings in the shop windows he had been unable to find one which he thought would suit the taste and fancy of his *fiancée*. He and Dunstan were acquaintances and had sometimes been called rivals.

The sparkle of a diamond in the rays of the sunlight, displayed on a case in a window, attracted his attention just because he happened to be thinking of diamonds. He instinctively turned aside to look at it. Next to the diamond, which was not remarkable as diamonds go, was a sapphire ring of antique design attached to a card bearing the explanation:

This ring is over 300 years old.
It was at one time worn by Marie Antoinette of France.
Price £60.

Mr. Solomon Goldstein, pawnbroker, had an eye to business.

"That's just the kind of ring to please Gene," thought Gibson. "It's a very common sort of place to buy anything, but I'll step in and see the Jew."

Ten minutes later Gibson emerged from the shop owner of the ring. He had bought it for £50, which was £35 more than Mr. Goldstein had paid for it. Gibson was well satisfied with his purchase. He knew the value of antique rings.

In the meantime, Dunstan was unsuccessfully endeavouring to swallow a few mouthfuls of food at the Holborn. The Tappersleys' ball was to be a grand affair. Arthur had invited Miss Santley, and there was no opportunity of escaping attendance or of eluding a meeting with her that evening. He had thought of illness as an excuse, and of making a clean breast of the matter by telling the truth; but the first was cowardly, and the latter made him appear stupid, and reflected upon the genuineness of his devotion.

He blurted out when he came into the room where she was sitting: "I've just discovered that I was guilty of a very absent-minded trick. You see that I left your ring on the table when I was changing my clothes."

"I will forgive you this time if you will promise not to do it again. I know you are absent-minded."

She was a picture of radiance, beauty, and graciousness as she stood before him in evening dress. He felt it was indeed a boon to have a wife who could forgive his little failings. "Only do be careful not to lose it, dear. I value it more than anything else I possess." Arthur winced when she added this.

Miss Marlowe was at the Tappersleys' ball. The knots of gossipers remarked that young Gibson had become very attentive to her of late, and also that Mr. Dunstan was with Miss Santley. During a lull in the dancing the two young women were thrown together. There was an exchange of greetings and two formal bows.

"Oh! Miss Santley, I have been searching for you all the evening," chirruped Miss Marlowe. "I want to compare this ring with your own. I think they are just alike." She held up a sapphire setting of old-fashioned design for her rival's inspection.

Miss Santley flushed to the roots of her hair. Then she turned pale.

"I haven't mine to-night," she said hastily, looking for a way of escape.

"I thought you always wore it?"

"I do. But—but—I am having it cleaned."

Miss Santley hurried on into the gossiping throng, nothing being perceptible to her save the hum-hum of the many mingled voices ringing in her ears. Miss Marlowe followed her with her eyes, and a little smile of pride showed itself upon her pretty lips.

"Mr. Dunstan," Miss Santley said coldly, when she met him a moment later, "I am not feeling well. I wish to go home."

Dunstan was greatly alarmed. He saw that the colour had quite left her face, and she appeared to be very ill. The carriage was ordered at once, and while they were waiting he sat and looked at her helplessly.

On the way home she lay back among the cushions in silence and gazed out at the falling snow. Arthur grew more embarrassed. He did not know exactly what was the proper thing to do. His heart was aching for her, she appeared to be so ill and seemed to be so bravely endeavouring to suppress it.

"Clara, what can I do? I want to do something to help you."

She rose up a little, stared at him wildly, and said, so icily that it fairly made the poor fellow shiver :

"Thank you !"

That put an end to the conversation during the remainder of the drive. When they reached the house, he attempted to help her up the steps in a lover-like way, but she refused his arm with : "I can help myself very nicely, thank you, Mr. Dunstan." As they parted at the door she said :

"Mr. Dunstan, I think we understand each other after what has happened to-night."

She closed the door before Arthur could realise what it all meant. When he did he was the most crestfallen man in London. The few hours of sleep he got that night were filled with travels through a wild, unexplored country in search of a recreant ring. On awakening from a short and restless nap the next morning, he sprang from his bed like a rocket.

"Eureka !" he exclaimed. "Now, I remember! I must have dropped it into the bundle that went to the washerwoman."

When Dunstan was dressed, which probably took the space of about two minutes, he was clad in his full dress trousers, a light waistcoat, and his smoking jacket. He threw his overcoat on over these, and made a double quick charge for Mrs. Jackson's laundry. He found the little woman picking over her morning's custom and watching her assistants.

"Mrs. Jackson, did you find a ring in my package yesterday ? "

"No, sir, I didn't."

"Yes, you did. Own up, now, or I'll call a policeman," cried Dunstan.

Mrs. Jackson had a wholesome fear of policemen. She stole the ring, of course. Goldstein, the pawnbroker, bought it of her for £15.

"I'll get it for you, sir. You shall have it back ! "

"Come and show me where you sold it, or there will be one less washerwoman on the face of the earth."

Mrs. Jackson put on her things and trudged along with Dunstan to Goldstein's. That worthy Jew admitted having bought and sold the ring, but of course he did not know the purchaser. Of course, he did not know that the ring had been stolen, and he was in no way responsible.

"Oh, I don't know about that, Mr. Pawnbroker," said Dunstan, biting his lip angrily. "I am a lawyer myself. It depends upon whether I get the ring back or not what I shall do."

Just at this point Mr. Goldstein's memory was suddenly refreshed. He didn't know; possibly he remembered the young man who purchased it after all. Yes, upon reflection, it was a Mr. Gibson. When he thought further he knew Mr. Gibson's address.

Gibson was sitting before his grate, devoting himself listlessly, by turns, to three occupations—munching toast, drinking coffee, and smoking a cigarette. On this particular morning he was quite contented with himself and every one else. When Dunstan came running in upon the quiet of his apartments his sudden appearance upset Gibson's coffee upon his dressing-gown, and completely unbalanced his mental equilibrium.

"Gibson, you bought a ring yesterday at a pawnbroker's—a sapphire ring of antique design. The ring was stolen from me. I want it back." Dunstan rattled this off as if he were making a summary of a case at law.

"Really, my dear fellah, aren't you a twifle hasty? Sit down and calm yourself."

"Well. I haven't anything more to say. I must have that ring to-day regardless of cost," said Dunstan, who remained standing.

"You see—aw—the fact of it is, Dunstan, I gave the wing—aw—to—aw—Miss Marlowe. Awfully embawrassing thing, you know, to awsk her for it. You couldn't—aw—wait a few days? I might—aw—pwecipitate a quahl. It's not a despewate case between us, you know. Then she would give it bahck. We might awwange a plot, like the story writers do, you know. You could flirt with her, and I would be angwy. Jove, you know, I think that's an idewa."

"I won't talk of it. I shall have to ask you to have the ring at my rooms by three o'clock this afternoon, or I shall be compelled to go to Miss Marlowe and tell her where you purchased it."

"Weally," Gibson attempted to say in a sarcastic tone.

"I suggest that you tell her it was bought of a bogus count, who stole it."

"Ya-as. That's a good ideah. Thanks awfully. I know so many of these fellahs, you know," said the befuddled young worshipper of rank and title, again trying his tongue at sarcasm.

"I never thought—aw—that Dunstan was such a prig. The ideah of him making such demands."

What method young Gibson used to secure the ring is a matter of conjecture, but of this I am sure, he did not care to have Miss Marlowe know that her engagement emblem was purchased at a pawn-broker's, for, promptly at three o'clock, a messenger arrived at Duncan's rooms, bearing a neat envelope which contained the much sought-for sapphire ring of old-fashioned design.

Two hours later a carriage stopped in front of Mrs. Jackson's door. Mr. Arthur Dunstan alighted and handed out a young woman. There was an anxious look upon her face.

"Mrs. Jackson," demanded Dunstan sternly, holding the sapphire ring between his fingers.

"Yes, sir, I found it amongst your things and sold it ! "

"Yes, that's all right. I believe you," Miss Santley said. "I was very foolish to doubt, but you used to think a great deal of Miss Marlowe, and she is a very pretty girl, you know."

Arthur slipped the sapphire ring upon her finger, and with it another—a diamond of modern design. Then he sealed the gift with something else.

It is needless to say that at the next ball, where both Miss Santley and Miss Marlowe were present, the former approached the latter and said in her politest tones :

"I have my ring now, my dear, if you wish to compare your own with it."

FREDERICK PALMER.

The next issue of **SHORT STORIES,** *a special double number containing 64 pages, will contain, in addition to the opening instalment of a new serial by E. C. Waggener, entitled,* **THE WRONG THAT WAS DONE,** *complete stories by Miss Winifred Graham, Mrs. George Corbett, J. K. Leys, and many other well-known authors. The number will be profusely illustrated, and will form one of the most delightful volumes of seasonable stories ever published. The price of his double number will be twopence.*

GOLDEN STAR

A ROMANCE

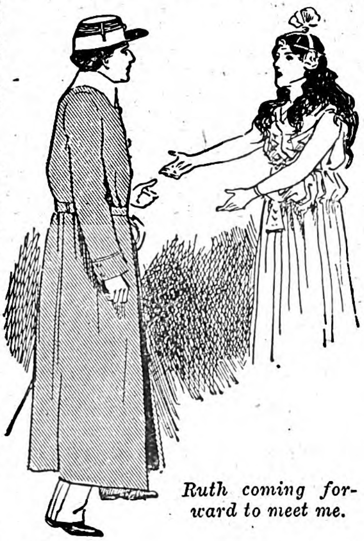
BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Valdar the Oft-Born," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DAWN OF AN EMPIRE.

I FOUND them in the midst of an English lesson, which Golden Star was taking, sitting, still clad in her Inca costume, between the Professor and Joyful Star, who also was still dressed as an Inca princess. They all three rose to meet me as I entered the throne room, and Ruth, coming forward to meet me with both hands outstretched, as she had never done before, said:



Ruth coming forward to meet me.

"What have you been doing all this time, Vilcaroya, and why are you looking so worn and haggard. Have—have you been fighting? And why have you come back here alone?"

"Yes," I answered, taking her hands into mine, and feeling all my blood turned to fire as their gentle pressure thrilled along my nerves. "Yes, we have been fighting, and the Lord of Light has fought upon our side, for we have gained the victory, and the city is ours."

"Thank God for that!" she said; "and that no harm has come to you—or to Captain Hartness."

"What! do you mean to say you have taken Cuzco already," cried the Professor; "how on earth did you manage this so quickly?"

"Because," I replied, "as I told you, my father the Sun fought on my side and turned the hearts of his children towards me, and so Francis Hartness led them to speedy victory, and the hearts of our enemies fainted within them, and they have yielded. Now I have come to tell you how it happened, and to take you back to the city where you shall be hailed as queen."

Then I sat down with them and told them all, from the taking of the Governor and his officers prisoners by the Sayacusca, to the capture of the Cuartel and the making of Francis Hartness governor of Cuzco. Then I went and put on the Imperial robes, which I had now a double right to wear, and led them through the gates of bronze into the Hall of Gold. Now, in the joy of my triumph, and the greeting that Ruth had given me, I had forgotten to bid her keep silence while going through the Hall, and when she saw the two cells in the corner built up with blocks of gold she stopped and said:

"Those were not here the other night. What have you had them built up like that for?"

And before I could answer, Djama's voice, shrill and trembling, rose out of the cell crying:

"Ruth, Ruth, I am here! This is my prison. It is a grave of gold. Curse the gold! Save me, save me, Ruth, for I am going mad—and I am your brother!"

She stopped and took hold of my arm with both her hands and looked up at me. Her face was very pale and her lips were trembling. Yet though her voice was low, it was firm as she said to me:

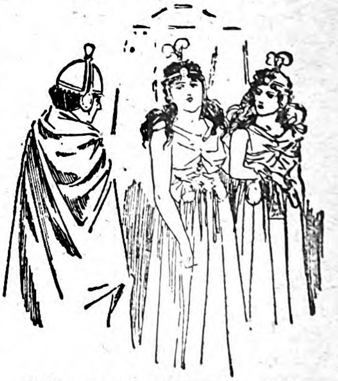
"I have no brother who is a liar and a traitor to his friends; but, Vilcaroya, I had a brother once who was very good and kind to me, and for the sake of his goodness and kindness I ask you to treat this—this prisoner of yours more gently."

"Joyful Star can ask nothing to-day that I could refuse," I said. "He shall be taken out forthwith and lodged with all comfort, though I must keep him safely."

"No, no, not till I am gone!" she whispered, taking Golden Star by the arm and leading her towards the passage. But, softly as she had spoken, Djama heard it, and in his rage and despair at her words he cried:

"You—you won't see me! but you will go with your lover, your Indian master who owes his life to me! You will sell yourself for his gold and be his wife. Oh, my God—my sister!"

And then he raved in the madness that came upon him, and his voice rang horridly out of his cell and echoed shrilly through the Hall and the passages. I could feel no anger against a man who was helpless and my prisoner, so I followed Ruth without speaking; and when we stood once more in the sunlight she turned to me with a bright flush on her cheeks and great tears in her eyes, and said very softly and sweetly:



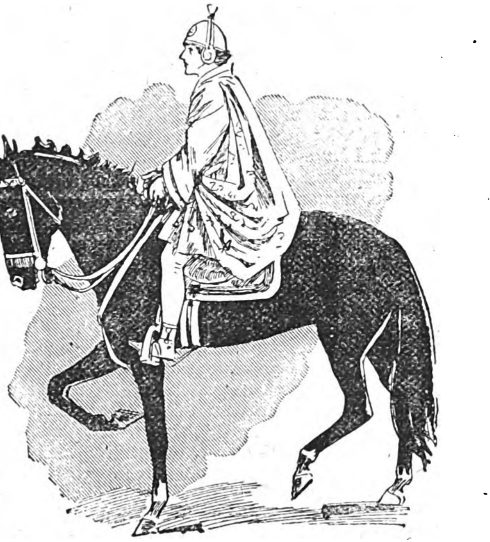
"No, no, not till I am gone," she whispered.

"He is mad, poor fellow; he must be. That terrible gold has turned his brain, or he could never speak to me like that. You will not treat him more harshly for it, Vilcaroya, will you, for you know, after all, he is—I mean he was my brother, and I loved him very much—once."

"Yes, he is mad," I said; "and yet the lips of madness may speak truth, for what am I but what he said?"

"Have you forgotten what you asked me or what I answered when I kissed Golden Star in the throne-room, that you can speak like that?" she said, with one swift glance that told me I had not asked in vain.

What more she might have said I know not, but she had said enough to set my heart dancing and my blood thrilling with a joy greater than I had found in the speedy conquest of the city of my fathers, and just then Tupac came to me and said that a sufficient quantity of gold had been taken out, and that all was ready to return to the city. Then I gave him my orders respecting Djama and his fellow prisoner, and ordered Golden Star's litter and the horse for Ruth which we had brought with us to be made ready, and also a mule for the Professor, and when Tupac had returned we set out along the road that leads to the Gate of Sand, I riding in the midst of the troop, with Ruth on my left hand and Golden Star in her litter on the right. As we approached the streets crowds of my delivered people thronged out to welcome us, and when they saw me riding on my black horse, dressed up in the Imperial robes, and with the Llautu on my brow, they set up a shout of joy and welcome, that went ringing along the streets and through the squares and all over the city, and so I rode on through the bareheaded throngs who bowed themselves almost to the earth before me. And as we were crossing the great Plaza, Ruth looked about her with bright cheeks and shining eyes and said to me:



Riding on my black horse.

"Is it not all like a dream, Vilcaroya? Only a few weeks ago you came here poor and unknown, and now you are a king come back to your own again. Is it not wonderful?"

"Yes," I said, looking into her eyes with more courage than before; "but something more wonderful even than that has befallen me. Is it not so, my queen?"

"Your queen is not crowned yet, your Majesty," she said, looking down and yet not frowning, as I half feared she would.

"No," I answered, "nor shall she be till my work is done, and the whole land that was my fathers' is mine to give her, and then all that power and gold and love can give her shall be hers."

"Give me the last and I shall ask no more," she said softly, chasing, with that first sweet confession, from my heart the last lingering doubt of the great blessing that had befallen me. Thus we came to the front of the Cuartel, where all the troops were already drawn up in order to receive us, and Hartness came out to greet us. He stopped for an instant, and his cheeks paled a little as he saw Ruth riding at my side, already dressed as she would be when she was my queen. But then the goodness of his honest heart spoke from his lips, and he said, as he held out his hand to me:

"Welcome, your Majesty!—Majesties, I might almost say, I suppose! The city is ours and everything is quiet. Some of the officials have come in and submitted; others I have had to put under arrest, and runners are coming in every minute from the other towns in the valley to say that our plans have been carried out perfectly. The rest of our work won't be as easy as this has been, but we've made a very good beginning, and, at any rate, I think I can congratulate your Majesty on having made your two most important captures."

He looked at Ruth as he said this, and though her fair face flushed brightly and her eyes fell, yet she spoke steadily enough when she answered him, saying:

"You can hardly call me one of the spoils of war, I think, Captain Hartness, though I confess that I have surrendered at discretion. Now give me your hand and help me down, and don't look so disconsolate, for you are not nearly as unfortunate as you think. There is an Inca princess for you also; a real one, too. I have been teaching Golden Star to say your name, and, do you know, she makes it sound just like music with that sweet voice of hers. See, here she is, and you shall hear her say it."

I had dismounted meanwhile, and taken Golden Star from her litter, and when the people saw her, her name ran swiftly from lip to lip, and a great shout of delight rose up from thousands of throats to welcome her back to life and the home of her long-dead fathers. Then I took her hand and Hartness', and put hers in his, and said to him:

"My friend, what I have taken I can in some measure give back to you. Here is Joyful Star's sister-soul and living likeness. I have seen her newly-awakened soul look out of her eyes with love upon you, as in good truth it well might, for you are a true son of the Sun, though not of our blood. In the days to come you may learn to love her too, and then all will be well."

"Yes," said Ruth, coming to his side, "and better than it could have been in any other way. The very Fates themselves seem to have arranged all this, so it is not for mortals to rebel, Captain Hartness."

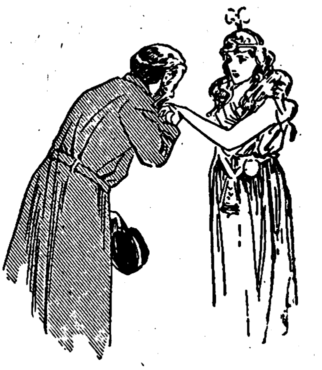
He looked at her almost sadly for a moment, and then he laughed a little and said:

"I should be more or less than mortal if I did, Miss Ruth. But mind, if I am faithless, remember it is you who have done the most to make me so."

As he said this he raised Golden Star's hand to his lips and kissed it. As she felt the touch of his lips a new light sprang into her blue eyes and shone and danced there, and she said to me:

"Why does the Son of the Great People do that, and what have you said to him about me, my brother?"

"He has kissed your hand in loving greeting," I answered, "and what I have said he will no doubt tell you better some day when you can speak together."



He raised Golden Star's hand to his lips.

The bright blood in her cheeks told me that she had understood me, and she turned her head away, but she did not take her hand from Hartness', and so I gave my hand to Ruth and led her into the Cuartel, and Hartness and

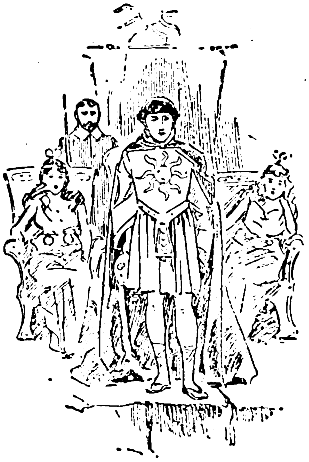
Golden Star followed us hand in hand amidst the cheers of the soldiers and the joyful shouts of the people.

That night there were such rejoicings in Cuzco as the City of the Sun had not seen since the Spaniards came into the land. I distributed the gold among the soldiers as I had promised, giving to each man a piece of about two ounces in weight, and they, who had never possessed, even if they had ever seen, gold before, kissed it and fondled it in their delight, and swore that they would fight for me as long as one of them was left alive, and then I spoke to them and told them that they had but to be faithful and brave, and their English leader would lead them to victory after victory until the whole land should be ours.

Later on I sent Tupac with many men up to the Hall of Gold, and they brought down the golden throne and the symbols of the Sun and great quantities of gold and jewels, and they set the throne in the midst of the terrace in front of the cathedral, with silver seats on either side of it, on the spot where in the olden times stood the Palace of Viracocha, and on the front of the cathedral, over the great doors, they fixed the symbols of the Sun, and high above all, between the two bell-towers, they placed a great flagstaff.

Before daybreak the next morning the square was thronged with people, save for an open space which the soldiers kept before my throne. I took my place amidst an utter silence. Ruth and Golden Star sat on my right and on my left, and Francis Hartness, with a drawn sword in his hand, stood by my throne to the right and on the terrace behind me, and on either side stood the Men of the Blood, dressed in their ancient and long-forbidden costumes, with which I had furnished them out of the stores in the secret chambers of the fortress.

No word was spoken and no sound was heard over the whole city, and all eyes were turned to the swiftly brightening eastern sky. The blue changed to silver and the silver to crimson and gold. Then the sun, the glorious image of the Lord of Life, uprose in all his sudden splendour, and as his rays fell on the great golden, jewel-rayed circle on the cathedral front, the Rainbow Banner ran swiftly up to the head of the flagstaff, and I, rising from my throne, bared my head and, turning my face to the rising sun, bowed myself before it, and at the same instant every head in the vast assembly was uncovered, and all save the soldiers fell on their knees and stretched out their hands to heaven in silent joy and thankfulness.



Then I lifted up my voice and spoke the ancient Invocation.

Then I lifted up my voice and spoke the ancient Invocation to the Sun which generation after generation of my fathers had spoken from the same spot at the beginning of the feast of Raymi, and when I had ended this the Children of the Blood lifted up their voices after me and sang the long-silenced and yet never-forgotten Hymn to the Sun, and then, standing before the kneeling multitude, I replaced the Llautu on my brow and proclaimed myself Inca and supreme Lord of the Land of the Four Regions in the name of my long dead fathers, whose divine right to lordship had been preserved in me.

And so I, Vilcaroya, son of Huayni-Capac, first fulfilled the prophecy that Anda-Huillac had spoken in the Sanctuary of the Sun, and so did I come, as had been said, from one life into another through the shadow of death and the darkness of the grave, with her whose love, now changed, though no less dear, had nerved me to face the ordeal of the strangest fate that had ever befallen one born in mortal shape.

* * * * *

EPILOGUE.

[*An extract from a letter written by Francis Hartness, some time Captain of Her Majesty's Border Rangers and presently General Commanding in Chief and Minister of War of the Empire of Peru, to his father, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Francis Hartness, V.C.*]

". . . . Well, now it is all over, and I think the best thing I can do is to give you just a brief clear outline of what happened after we took Cuzco, and this will enable you to connect up the rather scanty scraps of information that I have been able to send you in the intervals of the fighting. But first I had perhaps better answer your question as to what became of that most extraordinary of mortals, Laurens Djama.

"As I think I have told you before, the man was a perfect intellectual enigma. Personally I never considered him to be quite sane. That his genius for research and his knowledge of physiology were absolutely incomparable could never be questioned by anyone who, like myself, had seen absolute proof of the two apparently incredible miracles that he worked. But, apart from his science, he was a man of decidedly common clay, of strong passions, insatiable avarice, and practically no moral principle. From what Professor Lamson has told me since, he wrought his miracles with no higher motives than in the first place of using the Inca as a means of discovering the lost treasures, and in the second place for gratifying the passion that he had conceived for the Princess during the process of her restoration. This passion, together with the near approaching prospect of what he believed to be illimitable wealth, appears to have quite distorted, even if it did not entirely dethrone, his reason.

"His Majesty the Emperor has, I may say in confidence, admitted that he made a great mistake, possibly due to his ignorance of European character, in allowing Djama to see the contents of the Hall of Gold. Certainly he never was the same afterwards. Everyone knows how miners have gone stark staring mad after sudden discoveries of gold which at most could realise a few thousand pounds. It is, therefore, scarcely to be wondered at that on a man of Djama's temperament, the sight of millions' worth of gold and jewels should have produced a somewhat similar effect. Nothing else could account for his going to the Governor, a man he had only spoken to once or twice, and intrusting such a colossal secret to him when he himself was absolutely certain of a very large share of the treasure.

"Of His Majesty's action in walling him up in a cell of gold as a punishment for his treachery it is difficult to speak justly without a complete knowledge of what he himself thought of it. He acted under the impulse of the ideas and traditions which he had brought with him from his own age and his own race, and when we remember that the ancient Incas were accustomed to punish treachery in all its forms with instant death, it must be admitted that His Majesty acted in accordance with his own conceptions of justice, and with a certain grim logic which certainly fitted the punishment to the crime. But that he intended anything but the most generous treatment is quite disproved by what followed.

"Djama was released from his cell the night after we had taken possession of Cuzco, and the next day he was brought unbound before His Majesty after the ceremony in the great plaza. There, in the presence of his sister, the Princess, and myself, His Majesty reproached him gently and with the most perfect dignity for the crime that he had committed, and then told him that, for his sister's sake, he would give him back the life and liberty that he had forfeited. He would be conducted beyond the confines of the valley, and there set free with an ample supply of money to take him out of the country to any part of the world he chose to go, and when the war was over gold to the value of two hundred thousand pounds would be consigned to him at the Bank of England or anywhere else where he might choose to have it.

"I think you will agree with me that such generosity as this should have softened the heart of anyone but a hopeless scoundrel or a maniac, which, perhaps, comes to the same thing. But there was a condition attached to it which was perfectly just, and yet in Djama's eyes it seemed to annul all the rest. It was that he should leave South America immediately and never return to any part of the continent. If he was found in Peru within ten days after leaving Cuzco or at any time after he would be shot.

"As soon as Djama heard this his face grew livid and his eyes moved from the Princess to his sister, to and fro three or four times. Then, with a movement so quick that no one could stop him, he snatched a rifle out of the hand of the guard who was standing beside him, levelled it at His Majesty and pulled the trigger. The bullet missed his head by a hairsbreadth, cut off a piece of the crimson fringe of the Borla, killed two men who were standing behind the throne, and badly wounded a third.

"Of course, Djama was instantly disarmed and thrown to the ground. Without moving a muscle and without a shake in his voice His Majesty ordered him to stand up, and bade him choose the manner of his death. Then there happened the strangest thing that I have ever seen except, perhaps, the restoration of the Princess. Djama drew himself up and looked His Majesty straight in the eyes and said as quietly as if he had been delivering a professional opinion:

"'You have threatened me with death before, and I told you then you could not kill me. Now see if I spoke the truth.'

"He seemed to draw a quick, deep breath. Then the blood that had rushed to his face in the struggle died out instantly. His jaw dropped, his eyes became fixed and blindly staring, and his body seemed to shrink together and sank down between the two who were holding him. They pulled him upright again, and his head dropped forward. He was stone dead, as dead as if he had been struck by lightning. Of course there was a terrible scene, but I must pass over that. In fact, I don't care to dwell on it any longer than is necessary.

"We found the whole country in a blaze. Everywhere the Indians had risen and were massacring the Peruvians without mercy. Barrera, the revolutionary chief, had taken advantage of the disorder to start on the war-path on his own account. Nicola, the President, took the usual measures, and the first battle should have been fought near Puno, on the shores of Lake Titicaca, but to the amazement of both sides the majority of the troops simply refused to fight until all their arrears of pay were paid. This was an impossibility, for Nicola and Barrera between them hadn't a tithe of the money necessary to do it. So after that came mutiny and a general *battue* of officers.

"We took Sicuani, the railway terminus, without firing a shot, and when we reached Puno the soldiers of both sides who had mutinied just walked out and welcomed us, shouting '*Vivas*' for Vilcaroya and death to the Spaniards. From Puno His Majesty went to the Island of Titicaca and came back with nearly a steamer load of gold. He practically bought Puno up, fixed his headquarters there for the time being, and treated his soldiers royally. The news of this soon got to Arequipa, as he intended it should, and very soon messages came back saying that the city was his whenever he liked to come and take it. So we loaded up three trains and went down to Arequipa with a couple of carloads of gold. The garrison was waiting for us at the railway station without an officer among them. They had shot every one of them.

"We walked into Arequipa at the head of about ten thousand men armed to the teeth. The city, of course, submitted without a murmur. All the Peruvian officials that had not been killed were at once displaced, and the city was put under the control of a committee of the foreign residents and merchants. Then I took five hundred men down to Mollendo, and turned every Peruvian out of it at the point of the bayonet, sent the European inhabitants back to Arequipa, blew up the Mole, and burnt the place to the ground. Then we turned back and moved our whole force up to Puno, and there we found that, not only had the Indians of Bolivia risen *en masse*, but that half the army had marched across the frontier and were coming to get their share of the Inca's gold.

"Of course we received them, for they are capital fighters, and now with a thoroughly well-armed and equipped army we began our now famous march across the interior by Cuzco and Ayacucho and Tarma to Oroya, the terminus of the Lima railway. As you know, we had a bit of a fight at Ayacucho and Tarma, but nothing to speak of.

"We had a few smart skirmishes as we got near to Lima, but as soon as the Government officers found how strong we were they retired on the capital with such troops as they could keep faithful to them with all sorts of impossible promises, and at last we sat down before Lima, and gave the President twelve hours to surrender at discretion, and, as you know, he refused, and we went in.

"We had four days' desperate fighting in the streets, and lost over a thousand men. Then the Government troops threw down their arms and surrendered. Nicola was caught trying to escape to a ship in Callao Bay. Barrera, as I think I told you in a former letter, we had already taken prisoner in Arequipa. As soon as the city was quiet Vilcaroya had him brought to Lima, tried the pair of them for oppression, extortion, misuse of public money, and conspiracy against the public welfare, and then hanged them from the towers of the Cathedral. Then he installed himself in the Palace, and, as you know, issued his famous proclamation restoring the empire of the Incas throughout the whole of their ancient dominions, and after that came the treaty with Chile, for which I think I may take the credit to myself. The country is settling down with wonderful rapidity, and His Majesty is displaying all the marvellous genius for government that made his ancestors perhaps the most successful rulers the world has ever seen.

"The Peruvians are having rather a bad time of it, but no worse than their horrible misgovernment has deserved, but all foreigners are finding themselves a great deal better off than they were before. The great Golden Chain has been taken out of the lake in which it was hidden—the one in which Vilcaroya and Golden Star slept their long sleep—and was held by two thousand men round three sides of the Plaza in Lima on the day of His Majesty's formal coronation. A perfect flood of gold has flowed out of the old treasure-houses of the Incas, one of which, by the way, was in no less strange a place than the crater of the Misti. The coinage has been put on a gold basis, and we are buying ironclads and cruisers, and going in generally for European civilisation.

"A conquest of the whole of South America, with the help of Chile, who will very probably join us with a view to amicable partition afterwards, is now a possibility of the not very distant future. And now I don't think I have any more to say, excepting that the young lady who came out to South America as Miss Ruth Djama will very shortly be crowned Empress-Consort of Peru, and that I hope that you, my dear dad, will before very long be father-in-law to a Princess of the Blood."

THE END.

An Adventure with a Persian Beauty.

Translated from the French of A. Delpit.

◆◆◆

WHEN the department of Fine Arts sent me to Persia to write up the Province of Irak-Adjemi, I began by taking up my quarters in Ispahan. At the end of three months I had finished my task, but if I had returned home at once the department would never have believed that I was a man of any depth. I was just about bored to death, when luckily there was a change of governors. The Shah sent, in place of the former governor, his cousin Malcolm-Khan. He had travelled in France, accompanied by Mehmed-Aga, his officer of ordnance. Mehmed-Aga had the rank of general, or rather that of *sertip*, to use the Persian term.

I remember him well—a young man of about thirty, a gentlemanly fellow, something of a swell, who dined with me several times in Paris. You can appreciate my joy in meeting him again. In a week the Aga and I were inseparable.

One morning I was dreamily riding through the city, giving myself up for the hundredth time to the feeling that I was in fairy-land. Imagine immense avenues, bordered on the right and on the left with arcades, and shaded by gigantic plane-trees at whose feet are streams of running water. I was nearing the Kiosk of Tchechel-Sutoun, when I saw at the street-corner a woman in a litter.

As a general thing, Persian women in the street are like nothing so much as bundles. They are veiled, of course, or, rather, they wear upon their heads a kind of striped curtain which covers the face. Oddly enough, the woman whom I met did not entirely conceal her figure, which was slender and graceful, and I could see her large eyes gleaming like coals of fire.

My horse was walking, and I made him follow very slowly the bearers of the litter. It seemed to me that the unknown looked back once or twice; but, after all, as adventures of this kind in the East are somewhat unsatisfactory, I paid only slight attention to the matter.

I had almost forgotten the occurrence, when, two days after, I again met the litter. This time I was not alone. Mehmed-Aga was walking with me. At the first glance I recognised the veiled lady, and especially remembered those extraordinary eyes. As before, she looked back, but this time the action was more pronounced. I glanced at the Aga, but he pretended to have noticed nothing. We walked along in this way for about ten minutes, when the litter suddenly turned towards the Djoulffa Bridge. The bridge is somewhat of a popular resort for evening promenades, and so I hesitated about following my unknown openly. But there was no hesitation on her part. Suddenly she leant half-way out of the litter, and dropped her handkerchief upon the pavement. I picked it up.

During the rest of the walk the Aga was silent, biting his moustache with a preoccupied air. When we reached the palace he said: "Come in," and when we were alone in his study he began:

"My dear friend, I made no comments a little while ago. But instead of keeping that handkerchief pressed tenderly against your heart you must throw it into the fire."

"You wish me to do so?"

"I do not wish that you should have your throat cut and be thrown into the river. I am in charge of the police of the city, and I am responsible for you to the French Legation. You are astonishing people, you Parisians! You think yourselves always upon the boulevards. We are in the Orient, my friend; and in the Orient husbands are not to be trifled with. At Paris it may be different. Your unknown is not unknown to me. Her name is Nissa."

"Nissa?"

"If the name is charming the husband is not at all so. He is one Astoulla, a very wealthy merchant, famous for his violence and his jealousy. He occupies that house on the river bank just at the end of the bridge. His mother was of English descent, but his own manners are wholly Oriental. He would kill you like a dog."

"And Nissa?"

"Formerly," said the Aga, "unfaithful wives used to be sewn up in sacks and thrown into the river. But we are civilised now. Once a live cat would have been put in the sack. When maddened by the water, the cat would tear the woman's face. This is no longer done; at least, the cat is left out. The influence of Europe," he added drily.

This little conversation somewhat dampened my ardour. Moreover, Mehmed-Aga had the good taste to drop the matter there. I dined with him, and in the evening he called in musicians who played for us Eastern melodies. But I was preoccupied. Constantly before my eyes that graceful figure was bending out of the litter, and a little hand was dropping a handkerchief. A persistent voice was singing in my ear, like the refrain of a ballad: "Nissa! Nissa!" Naturally, I suffered all that night from nightmare. I dreamt that someone had given me an immense cat, named Astoulla, which was trying to tear my face. I awoke at eleven the next morning, completely disenchanted.

* * * * * *

In the evening I was alone upon the terrace at the back of my house, when a horrible-looking old woman suddenly entered from the lower door.

"Are you brave?" she said.

I smiled with that self-conceit which a man always feels when asked such a question. She continued:

"I came to propose to you a walk. It is night. No one can see us. You are to follow me. When half-way I shall blindfold you, but you must promise me not to attempt to find out where I am leading you."

I promised. The day, you see, had passed over my fears, the effects of the nightmare were, little by little, fading away, and I heard that persistent voice still singing in my ear: "Nissa! Nissa!" The old woman evidently came from her. I hurried up to my room and got a small revolver. Five minutes later we were on our way. It was mad—absurd; I confess it freely. But there are follies which one does not stop to reason.

When we had come to the Djoulffa Bridge the old woman stopped and took from her pocket a thick handkerchief, which she proceeded very deftly to bind over my eyes. I could see no longer. Then she grasped my hand, and I allowed her to lead me. By the increased coolness of the air I conjectured that we were crossing the river. In a few seconds the old woman turned to the right, but we were not quitting the banks of the Zend-Dehroud. I could hear its turbulent waters rolling by and breaking for an instant against the arches of the bridge. At last my guide paused, a key grated, and in a whisper she said:

"Go up."

Five steps only, and then I felt my feet were pressing a soft, thick carpet. At the same moment she removed the handkerchief. I found myself in a small room, dimly lighted by a copper lamp. Incense was burning in a richly-chased censer resting upon a table of red and green mosaic, and filling the room with those Oriental odours which intoxicate one like the fragrance of old wine.

Against the walls, hung with yellow cashmere, were musical instruments, and here and there arms in the midst of pendant chains and necklaces. From below came the dull and regular murmuring of the river. By lifting a little drapery from the window, I saw that the water touched the very walls of the house. Almost immediately I heard a light rustling upon the carpet. I turned.

It was Nissa. I was transformed with astonishment. She could not have been more than seventeen or eighteen. Her thick, dark hair fell upon perfectly formed neck and shoulders, and her face, slightly amber in colour, had all the changing lights of mother-of-pearl. But I was especially struck by the strange contrast between the exceeding whiteness of her teeth and the blackness of her eyes. The eyelashes, the tips of the lids, and her lips were painted. She smiled as she gazed at me with her still and burning eyes. I thought of the Aga's words, and said to myself that this woman could not easily be frightened. However, she took my hand and made me sit upon the divan.

"My husband has started for Teheran," she said, and smiled.

Then she struck a little gong with a copper rod, and coffee was brought in. She began to talk rapidly, telling me that her life was very dreary and that she had been interested in me at first sight. I was beginning to lose my head, when I heard a noise in the adjoining room. In an instant she sprang up and stood erect and trembling. Her welcome and her sudden fear had followed each other so rapidly that I had no time to analyse my feelings. She ran to the wall, took down a slender little dagger, and half-concealed it in her sleeve. She turned to me, and, with an emphatic gesture, said: "Wait!" Then she vanished behind the heavy hangings.

A vague fear stole over me. I recalled the Aga's warnings. Possibly I had been imprudent. Suddenly I again heard a noise in the next room; there were sounds of voices, then a short struggle, at last silence. At once the drapery was pushed aside, and Nissa reappeared. She was very pale—as pale as the pearls upon her neck.

She half-leant against the wall, looking like a white statue against the background of yellow drapery. She was still smiling, and in her smile revealing teeth as sharp as those of a young wolf. She took a few steps into the room. Her knife and hands were red.

"Good Heavens! What has happened?" I exclaimed.

"Nothing," she replied.

She tossed the dagger into a corner, and, with perfect calmness, said:

"It was my husband. He would have killed us; I preferred to anticipate him. Come, help me throw his body into the water."

I remained motionless, gazing at her in astonishment. Then she fixed her eyes upon me with an expression of complete contempt, and, in a tone that I shall never forget, said:

"Oh, these Frankish dogs! What nervousness!"

She shrugged her shoulders and called a maid, whom she commanded to open the window. Then, as if they were doing the most ordinary of acts, they lifted the body and dropped it into the river. The adventure was becoming too Oriental for me. I confess that I was seized with a wild terror. Without waiting longer, I ran away like a madman. Where I went I have no idea. In ten minutes I found myself in the city, and I ran through the streets as if pursued by a legion of devils. When I had reached my apartments I fastened myself in with a double lock.

What a night! I did not sleep till morning, and then my sleep was like lead. When I awoke the sun was high and streaming into my chamber. I was completely unstrung. What would happen? A man could not disappear without the law's taking cognisance of the affair. Nissa had not even made an attempt at concealment. The servant had seen and aided her. I should be implicated, and at the very idea of being associated with a crime I felt my hair standing on end with horror.

All that day I remained in the same condition, keenly anxious, and not daring to go out. The evening came and still I had formed no resolution, and no news yet of Nissa. Had she been arrested? What had become of her? I retired early, but could not sleep. On the second day I could endure it no longer, and decided to see my friend, the Aga. I arrived at his palace about noon. I was announced, and then entered. The Aga was reclining upon a divan, peacefully smoking his *chibouk*.

"Ah, it is you," he said, when he saw me. "Have you heard the news?"

"The news—the news? No, I have heard nothing."

"You remember Astoulla, the rich merchant, Nissa's husband, whom I told you about?"

It was all over; the crime was known. I muttered an almost inaudible "Yes."

"The poor fellow," continued the Aga, "my dear friend, he has suddenly disappeared."

And the Aga looked at me intently. I could bear it no longer. I was about to confess everything when he said:

"He was just setting out for Teheran, and suddenly—vanished. Nothing has been heard of him."

For the second time the Aga looked into my face. There was a short silence. Then, puffing out a long thread of smoke, he added calmly:

"God is great!"

The Lute with Silver Strings

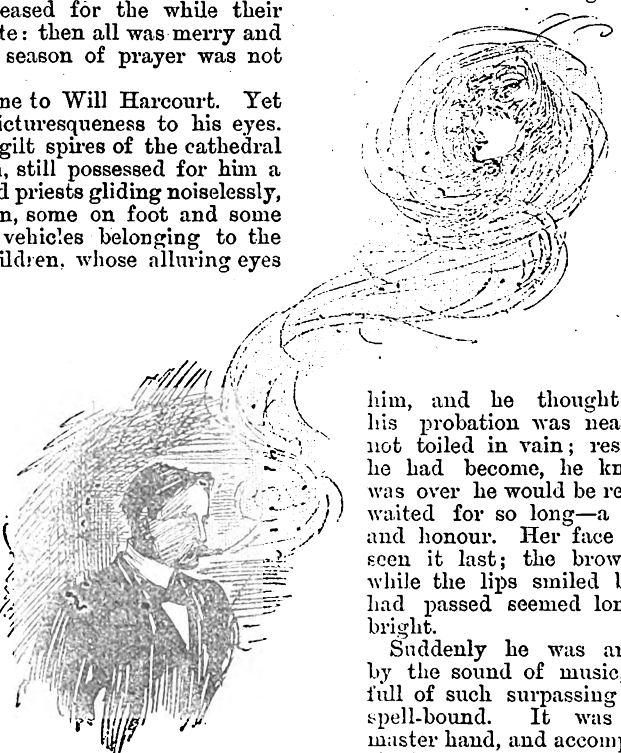
ONE! two! three! The soft-toned bells in the cathedral peeled forth the Angelus, and for a brief space the restless life of the city was still. Men stood with uncovered heads, women in prayerful attitude; even the little beggar children ceased for the while their importunities. Only a minute: then all was merry and noisy again. Yet the brief season of prayer was not without its influence.

The scene was a familiar one to Will Harcourt. Yet it had not lost its extreme picturesqueness to his eyes. The low adobe houses, the gilt spires of the cathedral glistening in the evening sun, still possessed for him a peculiar charm. Black-robed priests gliding noiselessly, gaily-dressed men and women, some on foot and some in the gorgeously liveried vehicles belonging to the aristocracy, little beggar children, whose alluring eyes never failed to coax the desired coin from his pocket, passed him, all hurrying to the plaza, from which the strains of the band already floated. There all the gossip of the day would be retailed, business discussed, Jesuit plots unfolded, and lovers obtain a sight of their *inamoratas*, a smile, a rosebud, or perhaps even a hastily-whispered word should the watchful eye of the duenna be for the moment turned away.

Will Harcourt, however, was not thinking of the dark-eyed maids of Mexico, fair as they seemed. Against their smiles and fascinations he was proof. Truth to tell, a little maid in Devonshire held his heart, and his thoughts, his love, his work, were all for her. The story was a common one. They had met, loved, agreed to marry; but adverse circumstances, in the shape of financial difficulties, prevented, and they parted, Harcourt seeking Mexico, where he hoped to make his fortune. And it was upon this he was musing as he stopped at the post-office for his weekly letter, which was handed him with a smile by the courteous official.

All of Harcourt's friends knew of his hopes and sympathised with him, while they admired the sturdy faithfulness and honour which made him true in every thought to the lady of his love and blind to the allurements of the gay Mexican city.

He was still thinking pleasantly of his letter as, the evening meal over, he settled down in the cool *patio* to smoke. Good-humouredly refusing all invitations of his friend to "come out and enjoy himself," he felt rather relieved when that gentleman took his departure for his usual evening tour of the city. Mr. Swain had fallen an easy victim to the Southern beauties, and clandestine appointments, as well as skilful eludings of duennas, were with him a speciality.



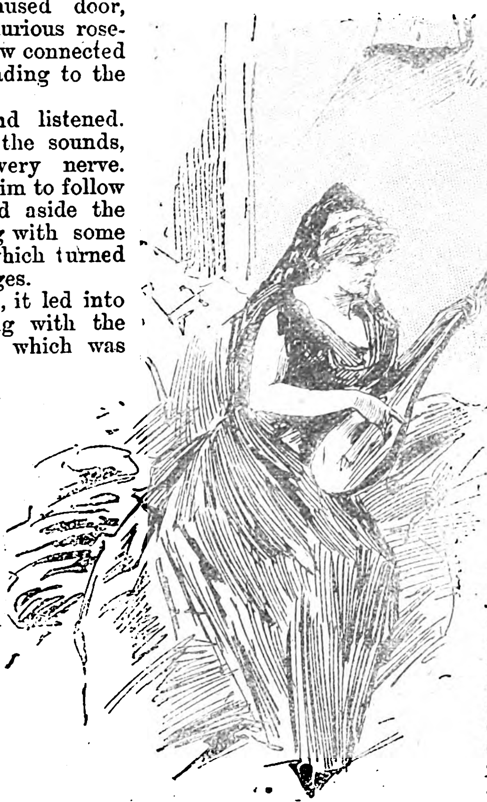
Her face rose before him as he had last seen it.

Harcourt's meditations were exceedingly agreeable. Pacing slowly up and down the court, scenes and memories, brought to mind by the letter he had just received, crowded upon him, and he thought with satisfaction that his probation was nearly at an end. He had not toiled in vain; respected and prosperous as he had become, he knew that before the year was over he would be re-united to the girl he had waited for so long—a man she might well love and honour. Her face rose before him as he had seen it last; the brown eyes filled with tears, while the lips smiled bravely. The years that had passed seemed long and dark, the future bright.

Suddenly he was aroused from his musing by the sound of music, far away yet near, and full of such surpassing sweetness that he stood spell-bound. It was a lute touched by a master hand, and accompanied by a woman's voice singing—common enough in Mexico, but Harcourt had never before heard lute or voice like this.

He glanced round. The door that led to the street was open, and the great dog lay peacefully in the passage. The sound did not come, then, from any serenading party, and as it continued he noted that it came muffled, as if through walls.

On the left was the city prison. It could not come from there. On the right was a deserted dwelling, the former home of one Don José Flores, who, in a passion of jealous rage, had stabbed a rival and fled from justice to the mountains, where he had become the leader of a dangerous gang of bandits. The house and property had been confiscated, and the government seal was still on the gates. Yet the music seemed to come from this direction, and he heard it more plainly when he paused in front of an unused door, covered now by a luxurious rose-vine, but which he knew connected with the passage leading to the Flores garden.



The light from the lamp fell upon a woman who half reclined on a couch covered with panther-skins.

He stood still and listened. Soft and sweet came the sounds, thrilling him in every nerve. Something impelled him to follow them, and he pushed aside the tangled vine, opening with some difficulty the door, which turned slowly on its iron hinges.

As he had surmised, it led into a passage connecting with the neighbouring garden, which was surrounded by a high iron fence, and filled with overgrown vines and bushes. No light came from the house, but he could hear the sound more plainly now, and, guided by it, he pushed open a door, then stood back amazed at his own temerity.

The door opened softly. As he had guessed, it corresponded to the one in his own house, and led into the *patio*.

The place was dark, except at one end, where a quaint silver lamp was fastened into the angle of the adobe wall. The perfume of roses came to him, and palms and potted plants were arranged round the sides, all speaking of habitation of the place which was supposed by every one to be deserted.

Nor was this all. The light from the lamp fell upon a woman, who half reclined on a couch covered with panther-skins. It was she whose voice Harcourt had heard, and it came to him sweetly and clearly now as he stood there, unable to move hand or foot.

Her clinging robe of black, confined at the waist by a silver chain, left revealed the beauty of her neck and arms, and the lamp, as it flickered and flared in the draught, gleamed on the red-gold of her hair like a living flame. Her long, black lashes lay like shadows on her cheek as she sat, with head bent a little forward, picking at the lute she held.

Harcourt, unable to take his eyes from her beauty, felt a strange sensation creeping over him as he stood silent in the shadow. Something warned him to retrace his steps, yet he felt powerless to do so. Suddenly, as if to make the decision for him, the door behind him blew to with a resounding slam, and the lady started up.

Fearing that she might be alarmed, Harcourt stepped quickly forward.

"Pardon me," he said in Spanish. "I heard the singing and something urged me to seek the singer. For my intrusion, fair one, you must blame this," and he touched the lute which lay on her knees, then stopped, astonished at himself. For three years he had not spoken in this strain to any woman.

She raised her eyes. They were dark as midnight, soft as the velvet pansy leaves, tender, compelling, inscrutable. From the moment Harcourt looked into their liquid depths, he knew but one desire, and that, never to look away.

"Intrusion? No," she answered; "you are welcome, for I know you, Don Guillermo, and have often watched you. It is lonely here."

"Then may I stay," he asked persuasively, "and hear you sing again?"

She drew aside her skirts and made room for him beside her. "I am Amorita Flores," she told him, "the sister of Don José. Sometimes I am with him and sometimes I am compelled to remain here, but must keep it secret. It is a dreary life, señor. I would die if it were not for my lute."

Harcourt did not answer. Leaning back against the panther-skins, he gazed dreamily into the star-set sky. A vision of Madeline floated across his mind, and with a sudden resolution, he started up, but encountering the eyes of Amorita, he hesitated, then sank slowly back again.

"It is a relic," she went on in her soft, languorous voice; "it belonged to a troubadour, and 'tis said that when he willed he could draw the hearts of men and maids from their breasts by its sweetness. See, the strings are all of silver, not one has ever broken. 'Tis said that when one breaks the spell goes also."

"A dangerous weapon," said Harcourt lightly; "yet I court the danger. Sing again."

Smiling, she touched the strings, while Harcourt sat with half-closed eyes, his hand, which had fallen on her shoulder, resting there unrebuked. He felt a sort of faint surprise at himself, but it was dim and far away. He was content to be beside this beautiful woman in the soft Mexican night. Past and future all faded—he was passive to her charming.

Her voice died away in a sweet, lingering note, and the lute slid softly to the ground. She leant nearer, until her silky hair brushed his face. His hand crept round her neck, and, emboldened by her silence, he bent and kissed her throat.

Her lids drooped, but Harcourt started up suddenly, resolutely throwing off the spell. He pushed her from him.

"No, I will not!" he exclaimed. "By Heaven, Madeline, I will not!"

Amorita also rose. Unheeding his violence, she stretched her white arms out languidly, and let them fall slowly about his neck, looking full in his eyes. One moment she kept him thus; the next he held her closely in his arms, while their lips met in a long, passionate kiss.

* * * * * *

Ralph Swain had, for some time past, noticed a change in his friend. He was abstracted and reticent, and looked worn and haggard, yet he declared that he was in perfect health, and seemed to resent any remarks upon his appearance.

One day, when they were standing in the store talking to a friend of Swain's, Don Juan Gonzales, a woman of wonderful beauty passed the door. Swain, always eager to view a pretty face, craned his neck to look after her.

"Jolly pretty woman that!" he said regretfully; "wonder I haven't seen her before."

Gonzales laughed, then turned suddenly grave.

"Turn your eyes away from her, my friend," he said. "That is Amorita, the witch, the fiend, the ruin of Flores. It is said that by obtaining new victims she keeps him in funds. It is certain that no one who once gets into her toils can resist her, and many a man has died for her perfidy. There is something about her that makes a man believe in her until he finds her out. I know to my sorrow, for she ruined my faith in women. I wonder where she is staying, and who her latest victim is."

A gasp from Harcourt drew the men's attention to him. He stood against the counter, breathing heavily, his face ghastly white.

Swain sprang to his assistance. "What is it, old fellow?" he asked anxiously.

Harcourt assured him that it was a sudden faintness produced by the heat; then, meeting the keen gaze of Gonzales, he blushed deeply. Swain thought no more of the incident, but Don Juan turned away, with a cynical smile, murmuring: "La Belle Amorita."

Truth to tell, Will Harcourt, from the time he first opened the door leading to the Flores garden, had lived in a very inferno of torment. Possessed by an evil infatuation for the beautiful singer, his days were spent in remorse over his unfaithfulness to Madeline—whose letters lay unread and unanswered—and a determination to redeem his lost honour and free himself from the toils of the enchantress. But, no matter what he might resolve, when night fell and the silvery strains of the lute came softly through the adobe walls, he would hasten to the garden of Amorita. In her presence his doubts disappeared, but only to assail him with redoubled force when daylight came again, and he was forced to undergo the routine of his business.

The money he had carefully saved for Madeline was lavished upon Amorita. He believed what she told him, and, urged by her not to betray her hiding-place, he guarded the secret so jealously that even Swain never doubted him, but continually jested him about his "hermit-life" and his fidelity to Madeline. When he repeated to Amorita Gonzales' story she weepingly denied its truth, and at the sight of her lovely eyes, filled with tears, Harcourt was ready to kill the man who had traduced her.

Time went on, until at last one day Will Harcourt awoke to the fact that he was ruined. A cheque given by him in payment of a bill had been refused at the Bank of Mexico. All the money he had toiled for had been cast in the lap of the syren. So far he had been able to keep his secret from his friend, but now that would be impossible, and, after a long day of conjecture, he resolved to bring matters to a crisis.

He would throw himself at the feet of Amorita, beg her to marry him, and then join her brother in the mountains. By this act he knew he would dishonour himself for ever, but it would be better than this double life. Madeline's face rose before him, and he shuddered as he thought of her grief and broken heart. But the face of Amorita—alluring, beautiful, irresistible—drove all other thoughts away, and he determined to follow his desires.

As night drew on, he paced restlessly up and down the *patio*, waiting for the sound of the lute, which was his signal to hasten to her side; but all was silent. Moments, hours, dragged by, and still she did not call him. Finally, devoured by anxiety, he pushed open the hidden door and followed the familiar way into the garden.

The *patio* was silent and deserted, the silver lamp unlit, but the moon, shining bright, showed him the couch at the end, and it was empty.

He called her name. No answer but the echoes came. With growing alarm he searched the house; her lace mantilla lay where she had dropped it, but Amorita was not there.

Returning to the *patio*, he stood bewildered. The palms, the flowers, were the same, the soft grasses strewn on the floor were undisturbed. The faint, subtle perfume which was inseparable from Amorita was in the air, but the lady had vanished.

Something gleaming on the panther skins caught his eye. It was the lute which had first lured him to destruction, pinned through with a small stiletto, and slipped under the strings was a note.

Hastily lighting the lamp, he tore it open and read:

Amigo mio,—I go to the only man I could ever love, my brave José. To you, who have made this possible, I leave the lute you loved to hear, in memory of your generosity. If that fails to compensate, there is the stiletto. *Adios*.

AMORITA.

The paper fell from his hand, rustling softly. The unfilled lamp flickered and went out. There was a sound of shrill discord, then silence.

The first rays of the sun, peeping merrily into the *patio*, fell upon Will Harcourt, stretched upon the couch of Amorita with the dagger in his heart.

Beside him, rent and shattered, its spell gone for ever, lay the lute with silver strings.

N. N.

A WOMAN ABOVE REPROACH.

"Were you ever in love?" asked Jack Fielding somewhat moodily.

"Yes, sir, many times," said his father, "but I was never a confounded idiot over it."

"Now, look here, Jack," said the Colonel, "don't be silly. The girl may be very pretty; I hope she is.

"However, once for all understand this, I will give neither consent nor countenance to a marriage with this woman. Besides that, she is penniless. If you marry her you must support yourself, and I imagine that when she finds that love in a St. John's Wood villa is to be reduced to love in a dingy lodging, the lady will agree with me."

"It's no good, pater, I love Vera, and shall never love any other woman. I am sorry to disobey you, but a man must choose for himself in these matters. Something will turn up for me to do. We can go abroad——"

"You can go to the dickins!" said the Colonel in a rage.

And Jack put on his hat and went—to see a very pretty woman.

* * * * *

Ten minutes later he had the lady in his arms and was talking nonsense.

Vera is silent for a moment, after he has told her of his father's anger. The sweet lips tremble, and then she says, with the least little quiver in her voice:

"I can only think of one thing, Jack, and that is that you should do as your father wishes and forget me. Though we might be happy in poverty, I couldn't bear to feel that I had cost you wealth, position, and your father's love."

"I shall be well recompensed with you for my wife," says Jack stoutly, "and, after all, something may turn up. Now, sweetheart, let us forget all this, and remember only that we love each other."

And they did.

The next day Jack strolled into his club. There was a letter for him.

"Who on earth is this from? A dun, I suppose. He needn't have troubled. Great Scott! Banknotes! One, two, three, four fifties. Two hundred pounds! Well, this can't be for me. Somebody's put the wrong letter in the envelope." A piece of paper, hitherto unobserved, dropped out.

"Ah, perhaps this will explain. Farewell, fond dream. No, more inexplicable than ever! 'From a Friend.' Who on earth can it be? I give it up. Thompson, another brandy and seltzer, please."

He had an appointment to take Vera to the theatre that night, and, as he was nearly due, he hurried off to his rooms to dress. Then he rushed to tell Vera.

"So you see, my darling," he continued, "we shall be able to get along splendidly. I wonder who sent it?"

"Yes, I wonder," said Vera.

"Let's be off. Why, Vera, you aren't wearing any jewellery to-night."

"I don't think it quite suits this dress."

"Oh, yes, it does. Besides," with a touch of boyish pride, "I like you to beat every one in dress as well as beauty."

"Well, dear," she said, "some of it has gone to be mended, and ——"

Jack looked at her steadily for a moment. Then, suddenly his face flushed. Her jewels gone—the anonymous gift; there would be no doubt about it.

"Vera," he said sternly; "Vera, you have sold them!"

"Sold them? Why, what do you mean?"

"Mean?" he said. "Do you think I am blind? The money I have received. Your jewels gone. Vera, you know what I mean."

"Oh, my dearest," she sobbed, throwing her arms around him, "don't be angry with me. All I have is yours. Are you so proud that you won't let me help you in your trouble? you who have helped me so in mine."

"There, there, sweetheart," he replied tenderly, "don't cry. But you don't understand that a man can't accept such favours, even from the woman he loves."

"But, Jack, most of them were your own gifts."

"The more reason that you should keep them. No, dear, take back this money; no, not another word, and if you want to please me let me see you with all your finery to-morrow. And if it does come to that sort of thing, why," with a grim little smile, "there is my watch or a dozen other things before we think of your trinkets."

"Jack——"

"Now, you don't want me to be angry? No? Then do as I tell you, like a good little woman. All the same, dear, this fresh proof of your love has given me more pleasure than the possession of money ever could."

The following afternoon he again went to his club. Another letter from Vera:

> My Dearest Jack,—Since we parted last night I have thought matters over, and can see that I shall only be a burden to you, and that it will be better for us not to see each other again. You will not let me help you, and I who love you will not drag you down to poverty. I cannot write more, save to ask that you will always think kindly of me as one who loved you better than herself.
>
> Vera.
>
> P.S.—Do not try to find me. It would be useless, as I am leaving London.

For fully five minutes he sat motionless, his eyes fixedly looking at nothing. His face was pale and haggard; he was as one stunned. Then with an effort he pulled himself together.

He rose to go. Perhaps he might yet be in time to stop her. He hurried down the club steps and came face to face with—his father.

"Good gracious, Jack!" said Colonel Fielding, "what is the matter? You look ghastly. Here '—hailing a hansom—"jump in and come home. In you get."

"Vera has left me," said Jack despairingly.

"What, already!" asked the cynical old man. "Well, I won't say 'I told you so,' but I did nevertheless."

"Ah," said Jack, "but it was not for the reasons you suppose. No one can accuse her of such motives."

"Well, well, we won't say they were bad motives. But why did she leave you?"

"Because she wanted us to be reconciled, and she would not be a burden on me now my allowance had ceased, and I was practically penniless."

"Practically penniless? Well, she must have been jolly extravagant if she got through that two hundred so soon."

"What two hundred?" cried Jack. "What do you mean?"

"Why," replied his father, "the two hundred pounds I sent you anonymously to the club the day after our little tiff."

R. L. H. C.

THE MYSTERIOUS PRIVATE.

Perhaps it was partly her fault, or maybe it was all his fault. Anyway, they had just had a quarrel—one of those unpleasant little affairs in which neither one nor the other will give in or acknowledge being in the wrong, but thinks it the duty of the other—equally blameless participant, of course, to first say—"I am sorry." And it was their first quarrel, too.

Then he falls back upon that old resort, and says: "I am going to the club." He gets his hat and coat, and is about to open the door, when she half repents, and asks him not to go, but to stay at home with her "at least one evening in the week." But he is either obstinate to her appeal or does not hear her, for he closes the door with a bang and leaves her alone, to return, perhaps at midnight, perhaps at dawn. Then she takes the usual course—throws herself into a lounge and cries.

He goes directly to the club. There he meets a few of his friends, and they sit down for a smoke, preparatory to the night's excitement at the whist table. Thus they sit for perhaps half an hour, when the entrance of a rather fat individual seem to create quite a commotion among the smokers.

He is besieged on the right and left to come and join them in their smoke, and Robert Langdon wonders who this rather stout individual who enjoys such popularity can be.

"Major Hunt, one of the most capital story tellers we have had for some time," answers one of his friends in reply to a laughing query from Langdon. "Wait until you hear one of his stories, and you will think so, too."

"Major, this is my friend Langdon."

The Major has hardly made himself comfortable before he is asked to tell one of his stories, and after a while yields to the intreaties of the crowd, and begins:

"There is not an army post in India, nor in the world, which has not some little romance interwoven with its history. But one which I especially remember is one in which the faithfulness of woman, as I will call it, played such an important part as to fix the story in my mind for ever.

"It was about five years ago, at an Indian fort, that this incident occurred. We had there a young private. I never did find out exactly where he came from, and I have even forgotten his name now. He seemed to be an indifferent sort of fellow, rarely joining the rest of the men in their larks, and keeping pretty much to himself. He was a handsome young man, too, nearly six feet tall, if I remember correctly. It was his mysterious manners which made us wonder what he did with himself during his spare moments—that is, when his time was not required by the Government.

"We tried in vain to find out. All that we could ever learn of him was that he was always in his mess room during these intervals, and his companion soldiers there said: 'He reads and reads all the time,' that's all. Army life did not seem to agree with him very much, and we could not see why he ever entered into it. Still there was no one with nerve enough to ask the questions we were so anxious to have answered. He was the one mystery of the fort. Perhaps you will wonder why we officers should take any interest in a common private but before I have finished you will see why that was.

"What was also a mystery to us was how he had managed to become well enough acquainted with the quartermaster's daughter to be seen occasionally out walking with her. Her name, you must remember distinctly, is Genevieve Hutle. She was the belle of the fort. I believe there was hardly a man in that fort at that time who would not have stood any torture if she had so wished—but don't be alarmed, gentlemen. No such thought would have ever entered that girl's mind.

"And then she was very beautiful. Perhaps this had something to do with it. Those among us who had been ill had especial reasons for feeling grateful to her, for as soon as she heard of a case of illness, she seemed to be on pins and needles until she received consent from her father to nurse the sick one, whether he was officer or private. In truth, her kindness and charitableness to all made adorers out of half the men in the fort, and the other half were dead in love with her.

"Now to get down to the story. One day there came the announcement that the natives in our district contemplated a rising, and that the men should be got in readiness to leave at almost any moment. One morning the command came, and a troop of cavalry was detailed to go out, and, if possible, bring them in. The matter had now taken a serious turn, for the few who had started the depredations on a small scale had been joined by the others, until several hundred of them had gone into camp. It happened that the 'mysterious private's' troop was the one detailed to go out first on a sort of a reconnoitring trip, and if on investigation it was thought necessary to send out more men, they were to return for reinforcements.

"It was a busy scene at the fort that morning. Soon the bugle sounded, the men leapt into their saddles and moved up to the gate of the fort. It was a proud moment for the soldiers who composed that troop, for it was their first actual expedition after an enemy. Then came the sound of the bugle again, and the men were off, with the cheers of their comrades ringing in their ears.

"We in the fort had many anxious hours that day and night, though we little thought that there would be any serious results. They would probably return, we thought, with the whole band as prisoners.

"During the night a terrible storm set in, however, and we kept watch to see if they would give up the chase on this account and return to the fort. But no. The night passed away, and dawn still showed no trace of the men. The storm seemed to become more furious with the advent of the day.

"Then misgivings regarding the safety of the men began to take form. We had now almost forgotten about the natives, and our only thoughts were of the men, and how they would manage to return to the fort in this terrible storm. About noon there was a lull in the wind, and couriers were sent out to see if any traces of the troop could be found. They might be wandering a few miles outside the fort, we thought, unable to find their way in. The searchers returned, however, after a fruitless search, saying that it was impossible to find any trace of them.

"About three o'clock in the afternoon, however, we were rewarded in our watch by seeing a dark mass to the west, and as it drew nearer a shout went up from the watchers, as we recognised our missing troop.

"When the men rode into the fort again, they were plied with questions as to what they had done during the terrible storm. But the queries were cut short by the announcement that they had been pursued by at least three hundred natives, who had poured bullets into the little troop for awhile, and that one man was missing altogether.

"Then for the first time we noticed that many of the men were covered with blood. They had not been out of the fort five hours, they said, when they were attacked most unexpectedly, for they had no idea that the natives were so near the fort. They seemed to have been waiting for them, for their retreat back was cut off by half the band, while the rest kept up a fire on them from ambush.

"They managed to get out of it without the loss of any men, however. A hot fire had been kept up on both sides while the retreat lasted, and several of our men had been wounded. The natives gave up the chase when the storm set in. The 'mysterious private' was missed when the troops emerged from a strip of wood about twenty miles from the fort. He was wounded during the fight, and had evidently dropped from the ranks through exhaustion. While the men were telling this, we stood about and wondered what could be done to find the poor fellow, who had now undoubtedly passed into another world.

"The storm had again commenced with seemingly added fury, and we realised what a dangerous undertaking it would be for any one to set out with the intention of finding the poor fellow's body. We retired to our quarters, after hearing no end of narrow escape stories from some of the privates, to await orders from the commandant as to the next move.

"We had all given up the idea of going after the body by nightfall--that is, all but one.

"Before the time for rising the next morning, there came to my ears the loudest cheering, mixed with shouts, that I have ever heard in my lifetime. I hastily put on my clothes, and ran out to see what was up. Near the gate I found almost the entire population of the fort, so it seemed to me, most of them engaged in cheering and shouting over something. Before I reached the crowd it parted, and two persons rode towards me—the 'mysterious private' and Genevieve Hutle. As she passed me, standing almost rooted to the spot with surprise, she called out: 'Pleasant morning, Major,' just as though she had come in from a morning's pleasure ride.

"Genevieve had actually ridden out of the fort at dawn to find the young scamp, who did not seem to be hurt at all—save for a few scratches such as the rest of the troop received. She had met him, fortunately, riding towards the fort, or God knows what might have become of that brave girl. It surprised me a little, perhaps, to see her so happy after such a dangerous undertaking. But that was, of course, natural then, as I did not know what passed between them during the ride.

"During the absence of the young fellow one of his comrades had cheek enough to examine his effects—to find out who he was and notify his relatives of his death, as he said, but, as I believe, to see what it was that kept him so busy during the evenings. But the stories the man expected to tell of what he found are still untold, for there were 'only a lot of books, principally law books, newspapers, clippings of testimony in trials, and a lot of other useless trash,' as he expressed himself. What the fellow was doing with these was more than he could imagine.

"Well, as you have, perhaps, already guessed, they both left us a few months later. I think he was pretty well tired of military life. He went to England, I believe, taking the belle of the fort with him. I have strong reasons to believe that this was settled during that ride into camp again. I heard of him once since then. One of his friends at the fort said he had quite a big practice."

"What's the matter, Langdon? Not going already, are you? The story did not affect you so seriously, did it? Why, man, I actually believe there are tears in your eyes."

"Well, no—but—I really have to go now. I have an appointment at home, and must go now, or I shall be late."

* * * * * *

Whether Robert Langdon had an appointment at home or not does not matter much. Sufficient to say that he did go directly home, where he found his wife on the lounge, just where she had thrown herself as he left to go to the club. A sob greeted him as he approached her.

"Genevieve, can you forgive me? It was all my fault, and, if you'll forgive me, I'll never do it again."

She turned up her tear-stained face to him, and he bent over and kissed her, wondering how it ever entered into him to be so cruel.

"No, it was not your fault; it was mine. I actually drove you to that horrid club, when I know you don't care to go there."

"Well, we will not fight about that just now. Do you remember Major Hunt, at the fort? I heard him tell a story at the club to-night—a story of how a young girl, a few years ago, rode out to rescue a man who had stayed from his troop, and how she brought him in, safe and sound. Shall I tell it to you? I remember it word for word."

"No, you need not; and if you're not going to stop your never-ending talk about that I am just going to get cross again."

He stopped.

PAUL ROPER.

THE TALE OF A CRIME.

M. THEODORE, *chef de sûreté*, sat in his cabinet deeply perplexed, his two elbows on his desk, his head on his hands. He was musing.

And was it going to last, this, which had been going on for so long a while? And these assassins, were they going to end by beating him? Were they going to compel him, by adverse public opinion, to send in his resignation?

Eight assassinations, one after another! Crimes of the worst calibre, with startling details, which peopled alike with horrifying visions the sleep of the bureaucrat and the *concierge*. And not an assassin, for all their skilful work, had they been able to lay their hands upon.

And now, to top-off these eight other crimes, there was still another, a ninth one—a murder like the others, accomplished the evening before under similar conditions, a woman with her throat cut, five thousand francs' worth of jewels gone, and—not a trace of the assassin!

"Nine murders, one after the other; nine crimes without an author; nonsense! impossible!"

The *chef de sûreté* pulled himself together, threw back his head like a war-horse sniffing battle, and—the door opened.

It was his secretary who presented himself, bearing a card in his fingers.

"A gentleman, monsieur, who insists on seeing you. He declares," and the secretary smiled a little at the absurdity of the idea—"he declares himself in a position to furnish you with definite particulars regarding the crime of yesterday."

"Ah, the crime of yesterday!" The chief turned quickly. "Then bid him enter," said he, and while the secretary regained the ante-room to do his bidding, M. Theodore cast his eye on the card before him.

"Frederick Bouscal," he read in a half-voice. "Bouscal, Bouscal; it seems to me that I know that name—that I've heard it somewhere."

He scrawled a line upon a scrap of paper and handed it to the secretary, who returned at the moment ushering in the visitor who had asked to see him, dismissed him with a word, and was immediately ready for the matter in hand.

M. Theodore raised his eyes. Before him was a man simply but neatly dressed, and with a frank and honest countenance, though veiled as by a cloud with a profound sadness.

"You have particulars to give me, have you not, monsieur?" questioned the *chef de sûreté*; "particulars, I believe, of the crime of yesterday?"

"It rests with you, M. le Chef, whether I am sure or not. All depends, in fact, upon an operation, the means of which you alone are able to furnish me."

"Explain, if you please."

"Certainly, and at once, though doubtless you have heard it spoken of, M le Chef; a certain scientific procedure which permits under certain conditions, better even than description can do it, a reproduction of the portrait of an assassin.

"You know, of course," he continued, "that in the phenomenon called vision, the object which we see throws or forms upon a screen in the eyeball itself—in plain words, upon the retina of the eye—an image which remains there until displaced by another. It has been proved, also, that this image continues even after death.

"You recognise, therefore, that if a person murdered has been struck from the front, and in a light sufficiently distinct for him to see, the last thing upon which his eyes would be fixed would, in all probability, be the face or form of the murderer.

"Naturally, the image of that face or figure would be thrown upon the retina of the eye, where—and this is what I came to say—it is not only possible to refind it, but also possible to reproduce it. Ah, well, Monsieur, in the case which occupies us——"

The door of the cabinet opened anew, and the secretary of M. Theodore re-entered, holding in his hand a roll of papers, which he laid before his chief, then turned and was gone again as quickly as he had come. M. Theodore lifted it and ran his eye rapidly over the contents.

"You are named Frederick Bouscal, are you not, Monsieur?" he demanded presently, addressing his visitor.

"Yes, M. le Chef, Frederick Bouscal——"

"Your age?"

"Fifty-eight years, M. le Chef."

"Hum—m—m!" M. Theodore rapidly twirled the sheets beside him. "So it was you, then, who was imprisoned two years ago, and condemned for contumacy and the theft of 1,000 florins?"

"No, Monsieur," he responded, with an effort, in a dull voice; "no, it was not I—it was—my son!"

"An *employé* of the Credit Agricole, was he not? And—you are ignorant of what has become of him?"

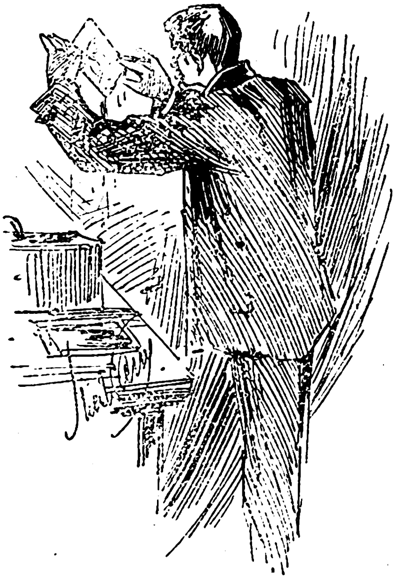
"Absolutely. It is fifteen months that his mother and I have been without news of him. That child, M. le Chef, that child has been our sorrow and our shame. He has broken our hearts, plunged us in grief, dishonoured our name——"

"Pardon me, Monsieur," said the *chef de sûreté*. "I have re-opened a painful wound! But I listen to you—you were saying——"

The man passed his hand across his brow and eyes to clear his vision, then resumed:

"I was saying, M. le Chef, that in the case which occupies us now the reproduction of the assassin's portrait should be entirely possible. The victim was struck in the face; the direction of the blow and the form of the wound indicate it plainly.

"Thus, Monsieur, we find ourelves in the presence of a half certainty. It is probable, if not sure, that the eye of the corpse now lying upon the slab of the morgue contains the exact reproduction of the features of the one you seek. With your permission I will draw it from them."



Took it carefully by its dripping edges.

"Draw it; but how?"

"By photography—it is my business, M. le Chef. And this matter, this subject I speak of, I have studied it long, and almost with passion, for I hold it to be, in case of success, one of the most useful and beautiful applications of modern science. I have myself experimented, and in one instance have reproduced the lineaments of the physician who had leaned above the bed of the dying."

"And you conclude——?" questioned M. Theodore, after a moment's thought.

"I conclude——but authorise me to attempt the experiment on the woman assassinated yesterday, and I will tell you what I conclude. If I succeed it will be for us—my wife and myself—a little glory, and also a little money—a ray of hope in our misery; if I fail—well, no matter—we are used to misfortune."

"Then so be it, monsieur," agreed the *chef de sûreté.*

In the obscure nook at the morgue, where he had inclosed himself in accordance with the arrangements made at the office of the *sûreté*, Frederick Bouscal, his body bent, his face drawn, watched anxiously the result of his last washing. The plate was there before him in its bath of quicksilver, into which he had dropped it a while ago with such fear and infinite precaution.

His throat closed as by a grip of iron; the operator held himself immovable, hearing only with painful distinctness the gurgle of the water as it dripped upon the faces of the dead in the adjoining chamber—the plunge of his blood as it throbbed and hammered through the arteries of his heart.

And at last the moment came—the moment that was to reveal to him all or nothing. He rose, took it carefully by its dripping edges—that plate upon which his fate was hanging—half closed his eyes, held it to the single ray of light that filtered through the yellowed pane, to stagger back with a groan of anguish, and let it crash into a thousand pieces.

His son! Good Heavens! The face of the murderer—the face of his son!

Five minutes later, when Frederick Bouscal, the photographer, came from his nook, and the *chef de sûreté*, awaiting him with impatience, hurried to meet him, he saw immediately by the pallor of his face, by his sombre eyes, that he had nothing pleasant to announce to him.

"Well," said he, "what success?"

"It's no good."

"Haven't you found anything?"

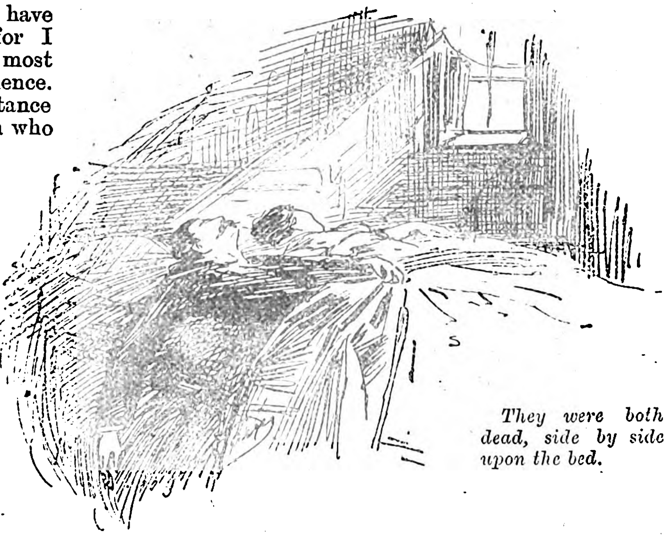
"No," responded Bouscal, "nothing."

"*Allons!* no matter; try it a second time; do it again."

"Impossible! the transparency of the cornea is destroyed. I wished to wash it, and I burnt it through mistake in the vials. I salute you, M. le Chef!"

The next morning the *commissaire* of the quarter of Ternes, forwarding to the Prefecture his regular report, headed it with the following item:

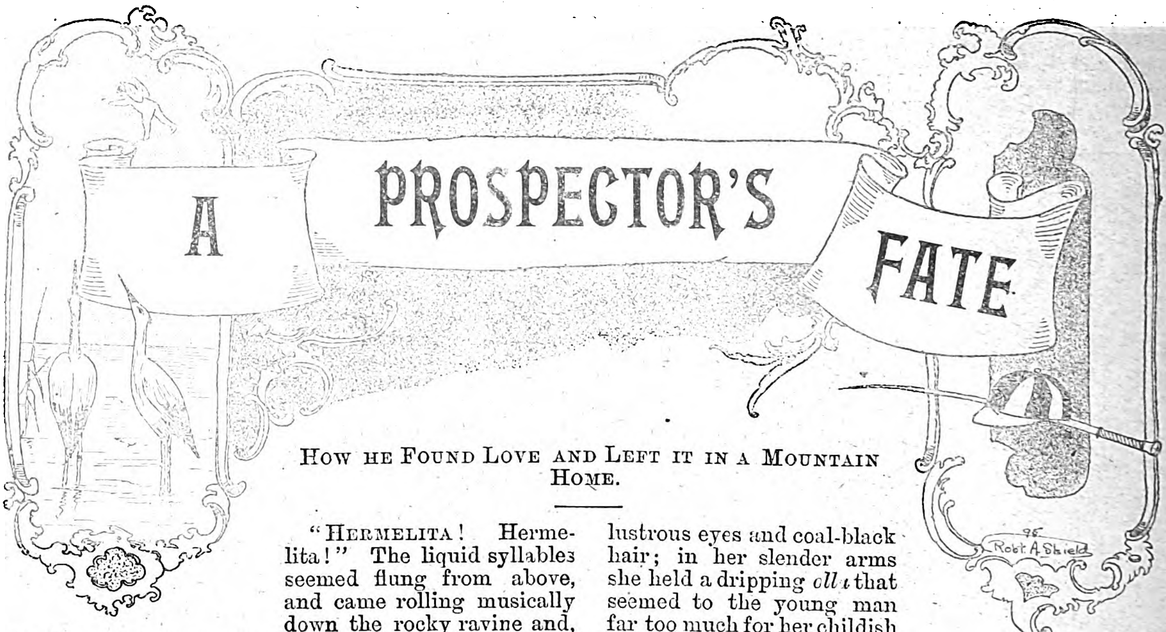
"To-day, at ten o'clock, a summons to 109, Rue Laugiere. A call from the *concierge*, suspicions of charcoal fumes from the room of the Bouscals, man and wife, his *locataries*. The door, by my order was forced. Too late—they were dead, both of them, side by side upon the bed, a brazier of lighted charcoal plainly indicating the manner of their death. A double suicide; poverty was the cause."



They were both dead, side by side upon the bed.

"Bah! these inventors," murmured M. Theodore, as his secretary concluded the reading, "they are all alike; stupid and rash; but how could I think of suicide for a cause so trifling as this!"

Le Vier.



A PROSPECTOR'S FATE

How he Found Love and Left it in a Mountain Home.

"Hermelita! Hermelita!" The liquid syllables seemed flung from above, and came rolling musically down the rocky ravine and, bounding back from the opposite wall, mingled with the joyous brawl of the torrent, sharing the pass with the road-bed. "Hermelita!" Both man and horse started at the sound of a woman's voice in these barren solitudes.

Since morning Cyril Wainwright had been picking his way through cañons and over ridges towards the brother peaks, San Bernardino and San Gorgonio, whose hoary forms seemed from the valley below to stand shoulder to shoulder. It was two days since he had left the quaint Spanish city of the Angels, equipped for a prospecting tour in the ranges piled up at the eastern end of the valley. It was twelve hours since, with horse and pack *burro*, he had trotted out of the tiny settlement of Lugonia and struck out for the base of the mountains.

After his first plunge into the foothills, he had not passed a sign of habitation, and now he had even lost sight of the glittering snow-crowns he had chosen for his beacon; the defile he was traversing gave glimpses of nothing save sky, and rock, and streamlet.

Wainwright was accustomed to solitude. Had he not spent eight lonely months in the wilds of Montana, and lately crossed the deserts of Southern California quite by himself? His bronzed face bore witness to former exposure, and his outfit bore the stamp of experience; but who would blame him for a joyful start at a woman's voice when he thought himself the only human being?

He pressed forward, still scanning the higher surroundings, expecting that another glance would reveal the habitation of some hill-loving mortal who had taken his abode in these fastnesses; and thus he passed heedlessly a trail to the left that led sharply to the creek, but came a moment later to a steep descent bearing traces of being a ford, albeit one not to the taste of the ordinary traveller.

Passing on to the brink to measure the incline and pick out the obstructions to be avoided in crossing the turbulent, rock-ribbed stream, Wainwright came upon a scene for a painter. On the less precipitous bank opposite stood a veritable elfin maid, tiny and dark, with lustrous eyes and coal-black hair; in her slender arms she held a dripping *olla* that seemed to the young man far too much for her childish strength; and, startled by his approach, she stood eyeing him timidly and yet with half-parted lips as if about to speak.

The girl looked on as if fascinated, while his surefooted nag stepped carefully down the steep bank into the swift, swirling water. The horse moved gingerly but unhesitatingly forward; and the man looked back to see how the pack *burro* he was leading took the torrent. The little creature clambered and slid to the water's edge, then shied suddenly, nearly jerking the prospector from his careless seat.

Just at that moment Sultan's foot must have struck a rolling stone, for the good beast stumbled, recovered, and stumbled again, pitching his rider, not yet firm again in his saddle, into the seething flood. Wainwright's last conscious moment as he plunged downward was filled with: "*Madre de Dios*, the señor will drown!" shrieked in the Spanish tongue; his next with a hazy vision of a boy and girl standing over himself in soaking garments; but a sharp pain darted across his eyes, and, with a groan, he fainted again.

When he did finally come to himself, he was lying in a comfortable bed near a tiny window, through which he caught a glimpse of snowy summits; the rafters crossing over his head were bare but smoothly finished, and there was an air of simple, old-world refinement about the neat room that puzzled him greatly as soon as his scattered wits were concentrated enough for him to remember where he must be. A gentle stream of talk flowed from the adjoining chamber, and, after listening dreamily to the soft foreign words for many minutes, he was attacked by a sudden curiosity to know who were his rescuers.

The groan he uttered was only partly feigned as he turned his face towards the door, and for the first time it struck him that he was severely hurt; but the sound brought Señora Ramona Ramagua to him in an instant. She gave a little cry of pleasure at the light of consciousness in his eyes; and Cyril forgot his pain, as he called eagerly: "Pardon me, señora, but will you be so kind as to tell me to whom I am indebted for hospitality, and how I got here?'

The matron shook her head, answering him in Spanish: "We speak not the tongue of the Gringos," and the young man put his question again in her own language, adding many expressions of gratitude to his benefactors. The good woman's features, which had set at the sound of the unknown words, softened somewhat.

"The horse fell in the *zanja*, the señor remembers. It was Hermelita, my daughter, and my son Carlos who saved the señor from the water and carried him hither. The boy caught also the señor's mount and the foolish *burro;* they are in the cave barn below."

"But you have not told me your name that I may thank you!" he exclaimed impatiently, and his hostess smiled with indulgent kindness, answering: "The señor may call me Señora Ramona; but now he must rest. It will be many days before he can go on up the mountains."

The Señora Ramagua spoke only too truly. The broken leg and the severe bruises resulting from Wainwright's fall and his being hurled by the angry water against the rocks in the course, took long to heal. It was a wound on the head that had caused him to lie two days in the cottage bedroom, unaware of his surroundings, and even after his limb became strong enough to bear his weight, he still suffered from sudden throbbings and faintness which were its after effects. That would wear away in time, the señora told him, nor would she hear of letting him resume his journey until relieved of all danger of falling from his horse in a dizzy fit.

Meantime the young man made rapid progress in the friendship of the family; before he could leave his bed, the group would gather in his room in the evening, and the señora or Cyril would tell tales, or Carlos would play his guitar and Hermelita would sing—Hermelita, whom Cyril had taken for a child, and whom he found to be a young woman, a Spaniard of the Spaniards—and so, indeed, was her mother. Later on, when he could limp slowly to the door with the aid of a stout stick, they made the verandah their sitting-room, and the long moonlit evenings slipped away swiftly and happily as in an enchanted realm.

Cyril used often to ponder on the oddity of the isolation in which these people lived. Señora Ramagua was a lady, with the culture of the daughters of old Spain; Hermelita was a daughter worthy of such a mother. She might have seemed ignorant to him among his friends in a distant land, but her poise and manner were perfect, and her utter simplicity struck him at times as wonderfully bewitching.

Why had the dead Spaniard made a home for such women among the rocky fastnesses? What manner of man had he been, who, knowing the luxuries of life, had hidden here where only the supplies of the hunter and fishermen were at hand, and where new faces scarcely appeared twice in a twelvemonth?

Hermelita had told him once that, since she could remember, a single trip to Lugonia had been her only journey; and he soon learnt that the señora, at least, was often exceedingly lonely, and that, in spite of the trouble he had caused them, his advent had been a godsend to both mother and daughter, giving them a long craved-for glimpse of the outer world.

Only Carlos puzzled the young man with his wild moods and lowering looks.

When the youth was seized with one of his mad fits, Hermelita and the señora would redouble their pleasantry, striving to smooth over the temporary interruption of their family companionship.

When his demonstrations and dark looks had been too evidently aimed at Wainwright, the señora, after his disappearance, exclaimed in a constrained tone: "The señor must forgive my wayward boy. He is not always master of himself."

Her apparent discomfort made Cyril hastily disclaim any resentment, attributing the lad's sour glances to some slight bodily ailment; but the señora did not avail herself of the polite effort to assist her in passing off a painful matter. The soul of hospitality herself, like all the best of her countrymen, she seemed to feel that an explanation of Carlos' behaviour was due to her guest.

"My boy is the heir of misfortune, señor," she said gravely. "Perhaps my friend does not know, also, that the child is only my foster-son. His father was the friend of my husband; but he carries in his veins the blood of an Indian mother, a woman of the missions. When the Americans came first to California, the Señor Gonzalez confided his son to my care and joined our defenders. He fell, and my husband, the Señor Ramagua, came home wounded, we thought to die. *Ay de mi!* Señor Wainwright, that was a bitter time. He had been happier had he been as his friend. Did not the Gringos confiscate our lands?—all the broad pastures, and the wheat land, and the grove of olives by the creek, where stood the house of his birth.

"Then came we to these mountains; my husband could not bear to leave California, his home; he was proud; he would not go to his relatives, and mine, grandees of Mexico, with empty hands; so he sold the flocks and the herds in Los Angeles, he brought men and built this house, he led hither his wife, myself, and the little Carlos, and my Hermelita, then a baby. Poor little thing! It has been a strange garden for thee, tender flower," and the mother's glance strayed to the child-woman beside her.

"Dear señora, why do you stay here?" cried her other listener. "You say truly it is a strange place for gentle ladies. Your daughter is grown; some day you will wish her to marry. Whom will she meet in these wilds? If, as you say, Carlos is not her brother, in what a position you leave her should harm come to yourself!"

The girl's long lashes swept suddenly over the bright eyes turned upon him, and her head drooped. But the white-haired señora, glancing thoughtfully from her patient to her child, murmured slowly: "It is true; but this is our home. The Los Angeles of to-day would not be the Los Angeles of my girlhood. They are gone—my friends of the old time—to Mexico, to Spain, to the grave. And Carlos—he never could bear to live with strangers."

She stopped and looked again wistfully into the young man's face, then with a sigh went on: "The Señor Ramagua, my husband, hated sorely the Americans; until he died he taught Carlos to hate them. Therefore, forgive him, señor, if he cannot get used to your presence."

"But I am not American, I am English. It does honour to the goodness of your heart that you took me in so freely," said Cyril Wainwright humbly.

"Nay, it is all one. You are a Gringo, you are a stranger. *Madre de Dios!* The good saints would forsake us, had we turned from assisting one sorely wounded! but had all been like Señor Wainwright, there would have been no need for this mountain asylum," exclaimed the warm-hearted woman. "But, Hermelita *mia*, *el Señor* has never told us how he came to take the old ford, passing the new one of Carlos."

Then Cyril gaily explained his absorption on that fatal evening, caused by the fairy voice floating above him; and his elder listener cried, laughing: "Truly, it is I who should nurse you, since I am the cause of this misfortune. It was no fay you heard, señor, but a mother calling her child, who seemed bewitched by the creek and brought no water for cooking."

The conversation of that evening cleared up for Wainright much of the mystery surrounding his charming hostess; and the knowledge of Carlos' antecedents added a feeling of distrust to his incipient dislike of the boy. In time he came to understand, moreover, that Carlos' soul burnt with jealousy against the handsome young man.

As his broken bones knit firmly, and the trouble in his head annoyed him less, the young prospector grew restless, and, little by little, began to take short excursions on the slopes and down to the creek. At first, the señora sent Carlos with him, but as his step became firmer, in view of the youth's disagreeable manner, she tacitly consented to Hermelita's taking the office of guide and companion to the invalid. Both the young man and the girl found this arrangement to their liking, and, in the short jaunts his strength permitted, Cyril found means to set chattering the soft voice generally so silent during the evenings on the piazza.

These were halcyon days for the little Spanish maid. Was not the tall stranger fine-looking as an Apollo? And he looked on her so softly, and told her, in her own sweet tongue, of the wonders and glories of his far-off city home! Was it any wonder that she loved him? But it was a long time before the child realised what made the sun shine so brightly and her heart sing when she was baking the cakes.

It was a jealous word from her foster brother that finally opened Hermelita's eyes and showed Cyril the precipice over which he was walking. He was really well at last, and was beginning to call himself a lazy good-for-nothing for quartering himself any longer on these hospitable women; but it was so easy to let the balmy days drift by, it was so pleasant to lie in the hammock in the moonlight and listen to Hermelita's Spanish lullabies.

From one day to another he put off the moment of parting.

He and the girl were sitting side by side, one morning, on a great rock, letting the spray from the bubbling torrent fly over them. He had taken the slim, childish fingers into his; and she sat with drooping head and half-shrinking form, while he tried to find words to tell her at length of his determination to go on to his work.

Carlos, with his gun over his shoulder, came singing up the gulch, swinging a couple of dead birds in his hand. He did not see the twain opposite until he stood ready to leap across. Then he stopped, fairly trembling with rage, his face a study of passion.

"*Caramba!* It is true then, he loves her!" Cyril heard from between the half-breed's clenched teeth, and the lad turned and bounded back among the rocks like a madman.

And Hermelita—she also heard! Snatching her hand from her companion, she sprang to her feet, the hot blood mantling her face; her eyes met his and fell; the next moment she was flying up the steep path to take refuge from her own thoughts before the little shrine in her bedroom. "*Madonna mia*, does he love me?" she cried stretching out her arms, "for I love him! Yes, Blessed Mother, I love him!"

What of Wainwright? Backwards and forwards he limped on the narrow strip of level by the stream-bed, anathematising himself for a villain and a fool. He had seen through it all in a flash: Carlos' jealousy, the mother's wistfulness, tiny Hermelita's unconscious happiness, and the light of awakening in her as she fled from him. And he—he had been so blind, he had worked this mischief so innocently. He paused, and placed side by side before his mind's eye a black-haired, elfin figure and a blue-eyed golden head, shaking his own head, and slowly he murmured: "No, it is Marie I love."

Ten minutes later he stood in the piazza, wringing the hand of Señora Ramagua. "God bless you, and forgive me!" he said huskily. "He knows my last thought would have been to wrong you or yours. Bid Hermelita *adios* for me. She is a child; she will forget."

The mother bade godspeed, with tears running down her furrowed cheeks. The prospector saddled his horse and, leading the little grey mule, pushed steadily up the cañon.

In the evening Hermelita leant against the great rock by the creek, with her head buried in her arms. Carlos, her foster-brother, came behind her, laying a light hand on her shoulder. The girl shuddered and shook him off, and the half-breed's look changed from gloomy tenderness to angry scorn. "Do you love him?" he cried harshly. "You will see him no more; his love lies over the mountains!" then more softly: "Forget him! I too love, Hermelita *mia!* I love you!"

"And you hate him!" flashed back the maiden; "I can never love you, brother Carlos!"

He frowned at her, and walked away.

In the dim dawn Cyril Wainwright rose from his camp-bed and stretched his stiffened limbs, long used to more luxurious quarters. Somewhat relieved from the heavy thoughts of yesterday, he whistled soberly, arranging his chattels and cooking his camp breakfast. The little grey mule raised its head from cropping the short grass and brayed uneasily, and Sultan pricked up his ears, looking at his master. Cyril thought he saw a skulking figure in the tall grass, and stood up for a better examination. There was a sharp click—a sudden report. The prospector flung up his hands and fell forward, his face in the fire.

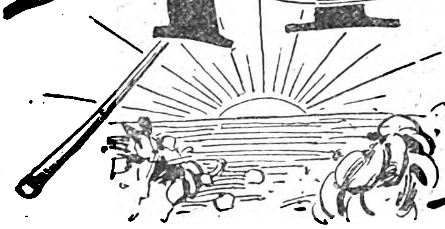
It was again evening when Carlos Gonzalez walked heavily into the kitchen of his home.

"You are late, my son, and you have been long gone," said the white-haired Señora Ramona, her kind eyes scanning his mask-like features.

"I have hunted long and am weary—and I bring home no game. Have you food in plenty, my mother?"

G. B. M.

A Tropical Adventure



Whoever has passed over the road from Champerico to Quezaltenango has passed through a veritable Eden.

Manuel was the *comprador* of the Finca Saquichilla, near the road to Quezaltenango. He had been to the seaport to superintend the shipping of the stores the steamer had brought for the *finca*, and after this task was completed, the frequent libations of *aguardiente* he had indulged in, to celebrate the fact, had set his hot blood on fire.

The long ride on muleback, after leaving the railway, had somewhat sobered him, but he took no notice of the beauties of the scene he was passing through. Tired, hungry, and ugly, he reached the *finca* as the sun passed behind the old volcanoes, and the shadows of evening were coming over the buildings.

No sooner had he thrown the saddle-bags on the stone floor of the court, and stretched himself to shake out the stiffness of the ride, than his employer, the old German who owned the immense acres, stepped out of the little office with the news of a revolt among the *peons* who were working the separator.

The half-caste who had acted as overseer during Manuel's absence had incurred such hatred by his harshness that the men had set upon him and cut him to death with their knives. Emboldened by the act, they had refused to work all day.

Manuel was no less hated, but the fear he inspired kept him from danger, yet black looks were shot after him by the low-browed, swarthy faces that slaved day in and day out for the bare pittance meted out to them.

Manuel was not a native. His father was an English sailor, his mother a Cuban, and he inherited the strength of one, the fire of the other. He looked upon the low herd under him with undisguised contempt.

His dark eyes fairly flashed their anger when old Metzler told him of the cutting affair. He sprang into his room that opened on the court and took down the great whip with the heavy stock—the one he always carried when standing by the men at work. His pistol was in his belt, where it had been during the ride.

Entering the long, low building, where the dirty, half-naked *peons* were grouped idly about the machinery, whispering ominously, he gave the order to commence work, although it was after the hour to stop.

Not a movement. Only a low growl of resentment from the half-human group, some of whom were already fingering the long sheath-knives at their belts.

One man to forty!

They were casting furtive glances at the Indian, José the leader, as if to catch some signal for action.

"Eh, it is you, is it?" said Manuel "stand out there."

The man did not move. The *peons* pressed closer about him. It was like the hushed air before an impending storm.

The hot blood in the *comprador* was working into a fury of passion. With a quick spring he brought the whip-stock with his full strength down on José's head, and the Indian fell like a log.

The *peons* were cowed. They went to their tasks like whipped curs.

* * * * *

The *aguardiente* had worked out of Manuel's blood. He was quite himself after a hearty meal.

The Indian must not die; he had no wish to do murder. He must be brought from the quarters to the house to have his head sewed up. Manuel's heart was quite melted when Metzler sewed up the great, gaping wound, and he offered to sit up part of the night with the Indian.

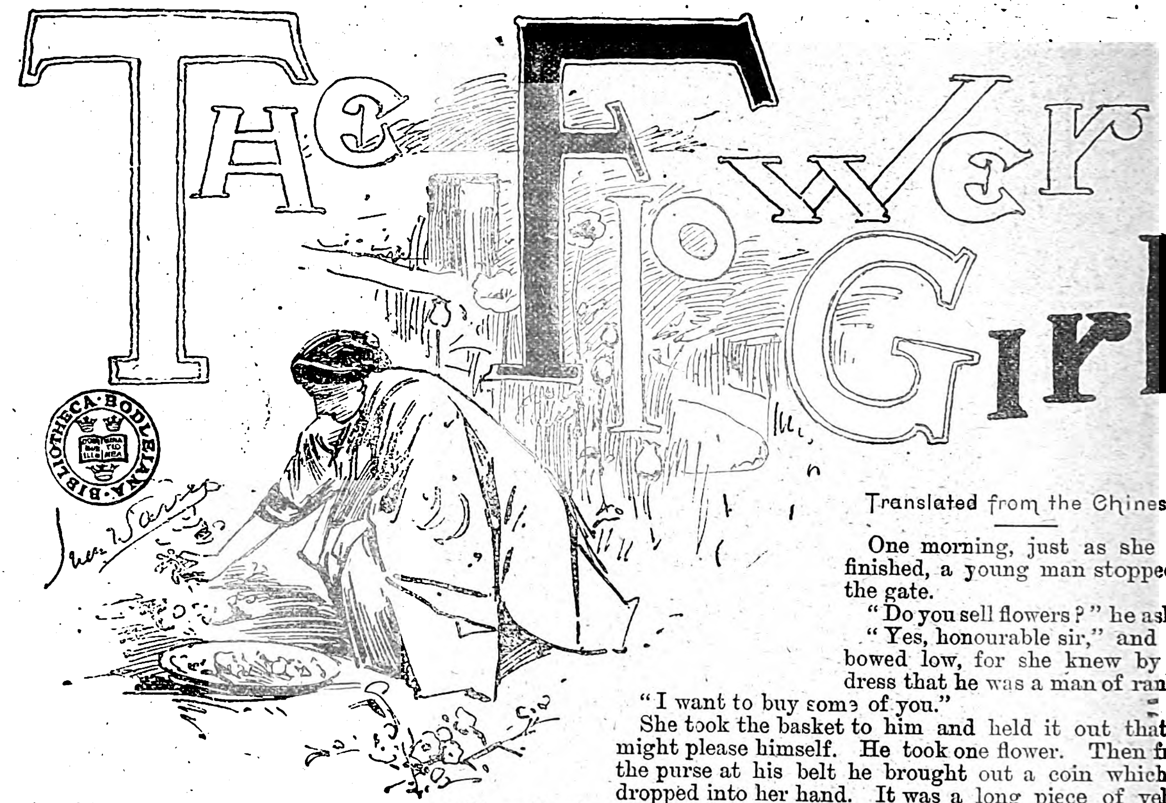
José was laid upon a low bed, apparently as unconscious as he had been since receiving the blow. Manuel sat by the window, smoking a cigarette, and looking out on the court. What if the man should die? The candle burnt low, and its dim light conjured up ghosts of the Indian in his mind. The long ride had fatigued him, and soon he was nodding in his chair.

An hour passed. All was quiet about the buildings, save the howl of a dog now and again. The *comprador* was breathing heavily in his deep sleep. The candle had burned out. Something seemed to grip his throat, and he started from his chair, only to find his efforts futile. He was too far gone to resist. It might be only a hideous nightmare.

Twelve o'clock came, and with it came old Metzler to relieve Manuel. He passed into the room and struck a light. Manuel was sitting by the window, his back turned. The old German spoke to the *comprador*, but he did not move. He poked him in the back—no answer. He held the candle by Manuel's face. It was black and purple; about the throat were the bruises made by great, iron fingers. He turned to the bed in the corner—it was empty. José had gone. Manuel was cold and stiff.

J. Craig.

THE FLOWER GIRL

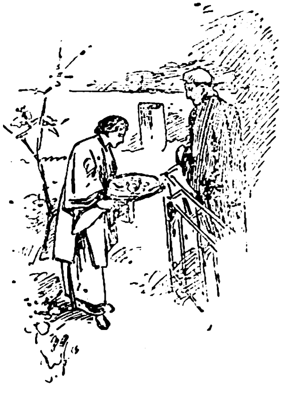


BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

Translated from the Chinese.

AT Nantai, close under the great south wall of Fuhchan, lived Suen Moi, the violet girl, in the house of her father, the maker of baskets. But he was old, his hands had lost their skill, and he was like a blind fowl picking at random after worms. They would have been poor had he not been as careful with his cash as a bee with its honey. Suen Moi did not know, so she sold violets that Heaven might bestow upon her the hundred blessings. Her flowers grew in front of the house, which faced the north, and she knew the flowers loved her, because when they blossomed they always turned their heads towards the door.

She called the flowers her children, gave them water when the hot sun tried to scorch them, and kept the weeds away. Every day she picked the best ones and sold them, that her parents might not die poor. Whenever she sold a bunch she always whispered:



"Ni-ho-chi-lok," that they might find comfort in the parting.

"The flowers of Suen Moi have souls," those at the market said. "They know her voice and her touch, and when they pass into strange hands they droop their heads and die."

But Suen Moi said they only wanted water.

She gathered her flowers early in the morning before the sun was up, and she kept them in a basket made of bamboo shoots.

One morning, just as she had finished, a young man stopped at the gate.

"Do you sell flowers?" he asked.

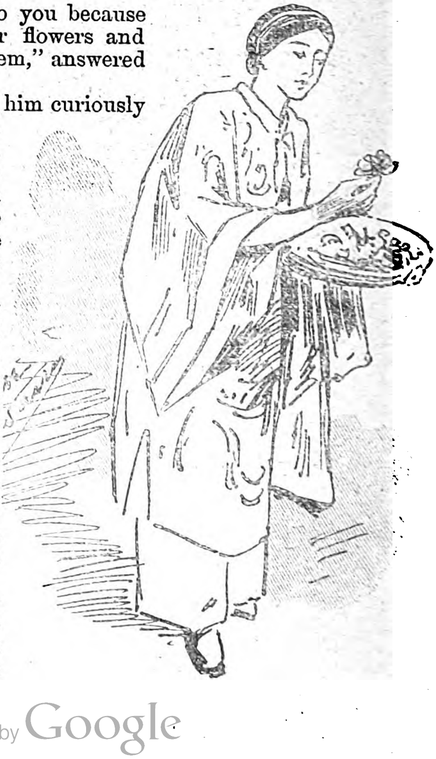
"Yes, honourable sir," and she bowed low, for she knew by his dress that he was a man of rank.

"I want to buy some of you."

She took the basket to him and held it out that he might please himself. He took one flower. Then from the purse at his belt he brought out a coin which he dropped into her hand. It was a long piece of yellow metal shaped like a knife. Upon it were characters which Suen Moi could not understand.

"It is too much;" she said like a child that cannot calculate.

"I give it to you because you love your flowers and are good to them," answered the stranger.



She watched him curiously as he walked away, and then she looked at the coin. When she went into the house she showed it to her parents.

"It is very ancient," said her father. "There is one like it in the museum at Fuhchan."

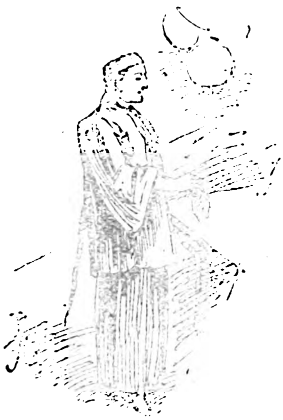
"It is gold," said her mother. "If we had three more we should be rich."

The next morning the stranger came again. He came over to where Suen Moi was gathering flowers, and said to her:

"Suen Moi, Suen Moi, give me a flower."

"I have picked the best one for you," she answered, blushing.

"Why have you picked the best one?" he asked.



"Because I know you love flowers too," she answered.

"Do you know you are a flower?" he said.

She hung her head. No one had ever spoken like this to her before.

"You are as beautiful as the flowers," he said. "Your heart is pure and sweet. I love you as you do the flowers."

"The stranger one is at the gate talking to her," said the father to his wife.

"I wonder if he will give her another coin!" she answered. "Perhaps he wants to buy her."

"You are like one who looks at the Heavens from the bottom of a well," he answered.

As he spoke, she went to the door.

"She is bringing him in," she said sharply. "We shall be disgraced."

Suen Moi entered with her basket. The stranger followed. The old couple kneeled and knocked their heads on the floor because they could easily see that he was a man of rank.

"I have come to announce my betrothal to your daughter," he said.

They were so astonished they could say nothing.

"You are not to send her to the market-place to sell flowers. You are to find a sin-shang, who will teach those things which she ought to know."

"But we are poor, honourable sir," said the old woman, who could not help thinking of the knife-shaped coin of gold.

He took from his belt an embroidered purse and laid it on the table.

"You are more wealthy than your neighbours," he said.

Then he went out, while the old woman began counting the coins.

Every day he came at sunrise and stood at the gate, while Suen Moi plucked one violet for him. One day she asked him:

"Where do you live, honourable sir?"

"In the Temple of the Seven Genii," and he pointed towards Fuhchan. "My home is in the Temple, but because you have asked me the question I must go away. When the moon shines bright and round again, I will return."

He walked down the road with the violet in his hand, while Suen Moi walked sorrowfully into the house.

For three days she grieved. The flowers which grew in the garden turned their faces towards the door, as if looking for her, but she did not come to them.

The black monster had laid his hand upon the village. The curse of small-pox raged. It crept like a thief through the gate and up the path between the flower-beds of Suen Moi. It stole into her room, and laid its hand upon her fair forehead, and chained her to her couch. The fever came into her face, then the spots appeared, and, last of all, the marks of the monster's claws. The flowers in the garden knew, and hung their heads in sorrow.

In her delirium Suen Moi found her lover. He had returned, and she was searching for a flower to give him. But they all drooped their head. So she raved:

"Raise up your heads: don't you know that—that——"

She did not know his name. She turned to him.

"I cannot call you 'he,'" she said. "What is your name?"

The blush seemed to come over her face because she was bold, but it was only the fever.

"I am called Wong-Fa," he answered.

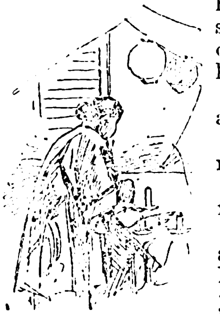
"That is the name of the God of the Flowers," she said.

"I am that one," was the reply.

But the memory of all this passed from her.

The black monster has no mercy. It has no soul, so it is continuously searching for human ones. It took the soul of Suen Moi, and left the body for the parents to shed their tears on. But as the soul passed down the path to the gate the flowers raised their heads and demanded it, and it went to them.

When the sun shone on them the next morning a young man stood at the gate waiting for Suen Moi. He had returned. He waited until he saw the white cloth across the door. Then a terror came over him. He walked up the path.



"Where is my betrothed?" he asked of the old woman.

"She died of the scourge last night."

He turned and looked at the flowers.

"You bloom in purple?" he asked softly. "You raise your heads in joy when she who loved you best is dead." He waved his hand gently over them, and they bowed their heads. "Why should you not mourn?" he asked them, and they shivered in the morning breeze. "Mourn for her for ever."

The old woman went in to light the candles, that the soul of Suen Moi might find its way through the darkness of eternity, and when the funeral procession passed down the path the violets were white.

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THE WILD RIDE OF ZULEIKA.

Translated from the French of Emile Moreau.

WHO can the horseman be that crosses the market-place of Mirouan, sitting erect in his saddle, with lance at rest? As soon as he came in sight the date merchants pointed him out to one another and spoke together in low tones.

It is the invincible El-Malek, chieftain of a fierce mountain train, who venerate him as a saint.

Since he lost his sons, two years ago, El-Malek speaks but little and never smiles. His beard has become almost white, but his arm has lost nothing of its power; he handles his deadly lance as if it were a reed, and when he urges his faithful horse Yussuf across the desert terror follows as his shadow. Yussuf, like all the horses of the South, has a strong back, slender legs, and large hoofs; like the five favourite mares of the prophet, he is descended from Soloman's famous stables; his coat is snowy white, and his long, flowing tail is soft as silk. Yussuf understands and obeys his master's lightest wish.

Erect in his saddle, El-Malek follows with a keen glance among the motley crowd a man in a gold embroidered burnoose, who had just come to Mirouan. The tradesmen also point at this man with their finger, but with a scornful air, as though indicating one stricken with the plague.

This man is Hassan Bey, the insolent chief of the Ouled-Nayls, who, jealous of his brother Ahmed, killed him with arrows shot from afar; he boasts of this deed, and laughs when he sees the crowd move away from him.

He had built upon the D'jelefa plateau, in the centre of his tented village, a stone house, which was also a fortress. For many years he had passed his nights watching the Arab girls dance to the sounds of the *derboukas*; but, one evening, passing near a fountain, he had stopped to look at the young girls filling their copper urns. And now he has come to Mirouan to buy bridal ornaments, for Hassan Bey, chief of the Ouled-Nayls, is to marry the beautiful Zuleika.

Zuleika is only a weaver's daughter, but she is very beautiful. The poor child wept, but she wept in vain, for the weaver is a miser, and the chief of the Ouled-Nayls is not the man to allow himself to be thwarted in his wishes. She must marry Hassan Bey, the fratricide.

Who could prevent it, since Allah permits it?

El-Malek had heard this story only an hour before he reached Mirouan, and he had said to himself: "Allah will not permit it, for I will prevent it."

Zuleika had placed her urn upon the ledge of the fountain, but had not thought of filling it. Her companions one after the other had gone away, but she still remained. It was the last time that she would come to the fountain, for to-morrow Hassan Bey would carry her away to his battlemented house, which was sombre as a tomb.

She lifted up her little bronzed hands to heaven imploring that death might be sent to her. Instead, Hassan Bey appeared, riding upon his flame-coloured horse and escorted by his warriors. He knew that she was at the fountain, and wished to see her there where he had met her for the first time. She was compelled to hear his lying words and to submit to his evil look. The young girl turned her eyes away, and as she began to fill her urn her tears mingled with the water.

"Zuleika!"

Who calls? Certainly Hassan Bey cannot have disguised his voice with such a grave and manly tone. Who is this man, with the white beard, sitting erect in his saddle, lance in hand, looking at her so compassionately?

"Zuleika!" he called once more, pointing to Hassan Bey who was approaching.

She looked up, and suddenly her eyes flashed with a new light, for she felt that this man had been sent by Allah.

"Save me!" she cried; "save me!"

El-Malek held out his hand and aided the young girl to mount before him. Gently holding her frail form he murmured: "Do not be afraid." Then, as though calling upon a brother, El-Malek said: "Yussuf!" The noble animal neighed, and started off like the wind. After Yussuf rushed Hassan Bey, with furious clamour, followed by his warriors. Some of them made as if to draw their bows. "No!" cried Hassan Bey, "do not shoot. I want them both alive!"

Urged on by gentle caresses, Yussuf flew faster and yet more fast. With loud yells Hassan Bey spurred his horse on, riding ahead of his escort. "They shall not escape me," he cries, trembling with rage and anxiety.

"Courage, Yussuf," murmurs El-Malek; "you are called the wind of the desert. Show that you deserve your name, my beauty."

The day advances, the sky seems to be on fire, but Yussuf does not falter. Suffocated at first by the furious flight, Zuleika now began to breathe more freely; so much ground already gained in the direction of El-Malek's mountain tribe meant possible deliverance. The child added her gentle exhortations to El-Malek's encouragements. Hassan Bey's cries seemed to grow more faint. Had he given up the chase?

But whence come these clamours that seem to start from the heights above them. Have his followers climbed and found a shorter way?

It is not the chief's escort that utters these cries. They come from a cabin high up in the mountain; the occupants are watching the exciting chase. Will El-Malek find allies among these people, or will he meet new enemies? His tribes are far away; if he is recognised the fugitives are saved. Arms are raised; they are called!

No, the bows send forth their arrows!

Yussuf utters a painful neigh, and El-Malek responds with a cry of anguish. An arrow has struck the horse's flank, and another has pierced the rider's shoulder.

"Faster, Yussuf! Faster!" beseeches El-Malek.

With a desperate effort Yussuf straightens himself out and flies under the whizzing arrows. He bounds like a gazelle that feels that the lion is on its track.

"Well done, Yussuf!"

Now there are no more arrows to fear; a wall of rocks crowned this height. But death is only staved off—

blood is streaming from the side of the noble beast; he begins to slacken his pace. El-Malek plies his spurs in vain, and Zuleika wastes her caresses and praise, for the poor animal's hoofs slip in the narrow path, and he staggers. El-Malek's arms tremble, he is beset with fever; the cool of the falling night does not suffice to refresh his brow; the profile of the violet mountain, and the confused shape of the turpentine trees, with their blood-red clusters suspended over the abyss, are mingled before his eyes. He cannot stop to drink at the brook which flows in the ravine, though a mouthful of water would perhaps save him.

Hassan Bey has seen traces of blood upon the rocks, and his cries of hate have become cries of joy.

"We have them!" he cries; "they are ours!"

And yet his voice trembles; he fears the final struggle and El-Malek's terrible lance.

Night has again passed, and the light of morning chases away the jackals that have come, scenting their prey from afar. Yussuf still runs, but much more slowly. Two days' journey separates him from the tribe of which his master is chief. Two days, and Yussuf has but a few hours to live! He feels that with his last breath his beloved master, too, will die. The path becomes narrower. Yussuf reaches the ridge, and, reeling, stops.

"The end has come!" murmured Zuleika, terrified; and for the hundredth time she besought El-Malek: "Do not remain with me. Your horse can still save you alone. Fly!"

"Yussuf can save neither you nor me."

"Then kill me."

"I have promised to save you!"

"Allah has not wished it to be so. Save me from this man!"

"That is what I am going to do. Alight."

"Ah, yes, I understand you. Death is at the bottom of this abyss. I shall seek it."

"You do not understand me. Look!" And with his hand El-Malek pointed to the north, to the other slope of the mountains, which could be seen through the hollow of the rocks.

"You see," he said, "that mirror that shines down there? It is Lake Zahrez. The mountain on the other side of the lake is the Djebel-Sahari. There is the tribe of my fathers; there are encamped my people. Hasten with all your strength. Order the first herdsman you meet to call in my name to his nearest neighbour, so that from summit to summit my name may wake my warriors. Cry to all the echoes of the mountains: 'El-Malek shall not die unavenged!' Go!"

"But it will take two days at the least."

"I will wait. It is my desire."

"Allah be with you!" She kissed the hand of the chief who had saved her life; then she ran down the road as quickly as her failing strength would let her.

El-Malek planted his lance in the ground and supported himself against it, erect in his saddle. He talked for a long time to Yussuf, and the animal shook his bleeding head.

"Halt!" ordered Hassan Bey. Reaching a turn in the road, he had seen El-Malek planted across the defile, and this new attitude astonished and disturbed him.

"Does he pretend to oppose us now? Let us wait, and in the meantime breathe a little."

The advice was good, and no one gainsaid it. Men and horses sought a spring. Hassan Bey, however, did not take his eyes off the redoubtable man who sat there motionless upon his horse between the two walls of rock.

"And now that all have rested enough, forward!"

No one stirred. So long as it was a question of pursuing El-Malek, the chief's followers felt brave enough. Now that they were called upon to attack him face to face, the boldest were afraid. Hassan Bey himself trembled.

"Let him begin," said one; "let him come on."

"Very well," growled the chief.

The day declined; the redoubtable sentinel, who had gleamed white in the burning sun, now stood out in black silhouette against the starry sky. Neither horse nor master stirred, and the lance still stood planted in the ground.

The moon rose, and it was an awesome sight to see this motionless warrior; he watched the enemy with his steady eyes still open, gleaming like diamonds.

"He is covering Zuleika's retreat," Hassan Bey had said to himself at the very first. And yet he remained in his place, changed into a statue, powerless to conquer the fear that emanated from this grand guardian.

After the rosy dawn, the leaden sky; after the red twilight, the blue night; then the aurora again; and the sentinel ever motionless, as well as those whose way he bars. Sometimes the shadow of an eagle makes a fleeting spot on the rocks; then the shadows increase, and great birds come from all corners of the heavens, drawing closer their rapid circles; now it is no longer eagles, but vultures.

They almost touch the lance of the cavalier, but he did not appear to see them. One of them perched upon his shoulder. El-Malek did not stir.

"He is dead!" cried Hassan Bey, mad with anger and spite; and, turning towards his men, who still hesitated, he gave the order: "Forward!"

Neither Hassan Bey nor his men advanced twenty paces. The noise that put the vultures to flight was the galloping of the Bedouin horses that had come from the Djebel-Sahari. The threats that Hassan Bey uttered to keep up his courage were never finished; an arrow pierced his throat, and, falling from his horse, he rolled into the abyss.

"Each one for himself!" cried Ouled-Nayls.

And while they rushed down the path at full speed, without daring to look back, Zuleika, sobbing, kissed the icy hand of the chieftain who had protected her in death as in life.

Totor's Drum.

ONE has not to see the General twice to know what to think of him. With his hawk's eyes and his tigercat's moustache, he is the accomplished, classical type of the handsome soldier, full of spirit, with a taste for war, and whose bravery is not without a touch of ferocity. At the same time one imagines that he comes from an old military race, and that it must have taken long generations of cavaliers to arrive at this product of a perfect performance.

When I learnt that the General was writing his memoirs, I immediately conjured up a collection of military orders, a succession of brilliant and monotonous charges, the whole ornamented with proudly drawn-up genealogies.

Well, see how mistaken one may be. Here follows the first chapter of these memoirs.

Upon what a slender thread hangs a destiny! To think that I was born to manufacture and sell silk.

Yes, indeed. My father, my grandfather, and all my ancestors for a long way back, I think, were engaged in the silk industry at Lyons, and evidently it was intended that I should succeed them.

That I have become a general is due to Mamma's black butterflies (low spirits), and, above all, to Totor's drum.

Totor was the son of our gardener at Montgain-sur-Saône, and Mamma's black butterflies were the result of our stay in that district, where she found little to amuse her.

A widow at twenty-six years, left at the head of a great commercial and manufacturing establishment which she did not understand in the least, she had retired temporarily to Montgain to escape the torments of her family, who wanted to marry her again.

This new union, it seems, was necessary to their interests. A man of great experience was needed. Now, this man was ready to the hand. His name was M. Lematthieu.

Thirty-five years old, with a fortune equal to our own, and a name celebrated in the silk industry—in short, exactly the husband required. That is to say, by the family, but not by Mamma. Married a first time in accordance with the requirements of social customs, she rebelled at the idea of being disposed of a second time as an appendage to the dowry. The silk factory might benefit thereby, but her heart would suffer. And hence her black butterflies.

I did not know all this till long afterwards. For the moment, a little fellow of eight years and a half, I saw but one thing—that the house was frightfully sad. Consequently, I stayed in it but little, and my time was spent in playing with Totor.

Playing does not express it; the true word would be tramping; for from the garden we quickly found our way to the village, and from the village to the fields, with all the young scamps of the neighbourhood. The gardener's wife was supposed to watch us, and so was the gardener. But the garden was so large, father and mother Barraud so lenient, the walls so easy to climb, and the alleys so tempting! And, above all, Totor was so shy!

Ah, our fine adventures! I remember them as if it were but yesterday; and there is especially one I shall never forget. Was it not, in fact, my first campaign? My real military service dates from that occasion.

I can still see us that day, organised into a company of soldiers by the ingenious Totor.

He was eleven years old, and had a right to command us—me and the other young rogues of the vicinity. But he respected me, and so I was appointed captain.

Our army was composed of a dozen soldiers, among whom Totor had distributed guns of his own manufacture, to the detriment of vines deprived of props, and of brooms divorced from their handles.

For me he had fashioned a sword, not of vulgar wood like the guns of the men, but of real metal, using the long handle of a frying-pan. In my cap he had stuck the feathers from the tail of an unfortunate rooster, who was obliged thenceforth to hide his shame behind a shed.

To himself Totor presented a drum. This he had not accomplished without some difficulty. It had been his first intention to utilise a saucepan, but Virginie, the cook, had vetoed that project. In despair Totor had contented himself with an old high hat, *borrowed* from his father, and from which he had torn the brim. It made a black drum, with hollow and muffled sounds. We had the air of leading a funeral procession.

No matter! Thus equipped, we started out for the conquest of pears and grapes, and I marched proudly behind Totor, straightening myself up, with my sword shining in the sunlight, at least, as brilliantly as the handle of a greasy frying-pan can shine. We crossed the village, having no flag except the shirt-flap that floated behind our smallest soldier. And soon we were in the country, ready for pillage, excited by the furious rhythm of the black drum.

"Halt! Who goes there? Advance and give the countersign!"

It was an unknown, formidable voice that welcomed us thus at a turn in a ditch.

An armed enemy was before us.

Composed of a single man, it is true, but what a man! A *real* soldier! What do I say? An officer, with red pantaloons, with a steel scabbard dangling from his left side, and a big curling moustache.

Save himself who can! Our army disbanded, throwing away its guns, and disappeared like a scattered flock of sparrows. I, the captain, let fall at the feet of the conqueror my humiliated pan-handle.

Totor alone put on a bold front, clapped his drum on his head to give himself an imposing air, and answered as bravely as anything:

"France, colonel."

The colonel was only a lieutenant, and began to laugh.

"And where are you going in this fashion," said he, "my little foot-soldiers?"

"Why, to make war, captain," answered Totor, lowering the grade of his enemy, who was no longer terrible now that he laughed.

"Well," continued the officer, "will you serve under my order? I am just now in search of a breakfast to be taken by assault. Conduct me to the nearest restaurant, and I will treat you to a drink, my grenadiers."

Totor's nose at that moment expressed two struggling sentiments. He was attracted by the hope of the drink, but he was disappointed in his heroic projects of making war.

The enemy was far too good-natured, in truth. So Totor preserved a contemptuous silence.

"You will not?" said the officer. "Brave soldiers, you are! But you, the little general, who have such pretty manners?"

And he tapped my cheek coaxingly. Indeed, he was very amiable, this officer, and the more I looked at him the more he pleased me. Tall, slender, young, he had a fine, open face, and his warlike moustache made his soft eyes seem softer by contrast. His very fine hand had caressed my skin.

And suddenly, while Totor was hesitating between his two opposite ideas, there came an idea to me which I thought admirable.

"Yes," said I, "I know of a restaurant, and I am very willing to take you to it."

"Where?" asked Totor.

"Why, our house."

Totor grasped my idea immediately, and cried out gleefully:

"Yes, yes. Oh, that will be a lark."

The officer paid no attention to my dress, though it did not indicate the son of an innkeeper. He took me for such, and followed us.

"And," said he, on the way, "I suppose they feed well at your house, do they not?"

"Pretty well, my nephew," answered Totor, who had grown quite disrespectful towards an enemy whom we seemed to have taken prisoner.

And soon we were at the villa, in the garden, where Mamma, with nothing on her head, and dressed in a morning wrapper, was dolefully taking the air with her black butterflies.

At the sight of Mamma and the coquettish house, the lieutenant perceived the mistake that he had made. He excused himself as best he could. He was out on a surveying excursion, three leagues from the camp at Sathonay, too far to return, and then these young rascals—— He was charming in his excuses, confused but not awkward, at once gallant and exquisitely polite.

As for Mamma, I saw clearly that she was like myself, and that the officer pleased her.

"It is this pretty little rogue," said he, tapping my cheek again, "who is the cause of my indecorum. Pardon me, madame."

"But there is no indecorum," answered Mamma. "I am not at all angry, monsieur, either with you or with him."

She even added (for she was always unable to conceal her thoughts):

"On the contrary."

In short, the lieutenant stayed to breakfast as easily as a thread slips into the needle. He even spent the afternoon at the house. Mamma appeared delighted with him, and so was I.

One is forced to believe, moreover, that our villa was a strategic point of the highest importance, for thenceforth it became the centre of the famous surveying operations.

And certainly the topography of its surroundings, and especially of our garden, must be minutely noted on the military maps, for the lieutenant soon formed the habit of studying it every day.

One is forced to believe, also, that his red pantaloons frightened the black butterflies, for they flew away as soon as he appeared, from the very first day.

Mamma became joyous again, and her joy continually increased for three months, until the moment when it blossomed out completely, on the day when Mamma abandoned my father's name, but not to take that of M. Lematthieu.

The affairs of the commercial establishment were wound up. My ancestors blushed, no doubt, at our treason. But I had not the slightest remorse, and I have none to this hour. I formed a taste for the noble profession of my stepfather; instead of learning debit and credit, I learnt fencing, horsemanship, and the various other things required for entrance to Saint Cyr. And now, thanks to Mamma's black butterflies and to Totor's drum, I am a general.

Yet of my ancestors there remains with me one indelible mark. There is still one kind of silk with which I am somewhat familiar—that of which flags are made.

Jean Richepin.

THE TREASURES OF THE WHITE GOD

The Story of a Shameful Crime.

SUMMARY.

Robert Lane, escaped convict No. 407, is tracked to the World's Fair Grounds at Chicago. He is last seen, after an exciting chase by Mr. Inspector Grey and his assistant, Detective Dean, locked in a burning boat on the lake. Detective Dean finds a cipher in the convict's bed, which he sells to Mr. Richard Sheldon for £2,000.

CHAPTER V.

The Cryptogram.

The piece of parchment which the detective had given to Richard Sheldon was time-worn, creased, well-nigh illegible.

More than that, the few lines it bore were formed, not of letters, but of characters peculiarly shaped, vague, and entirely unintelligible to the man who had just paid £2,000 for its possession.

And yet, as he surveyed it, the sinister eyes of Sheldon sparkled as though he was regarding a pearl of unheard of value, the clue to untold riches, the key to a vast fortune.

"It is, it must be, the missing link," he murmured, after nearly an hour's silent, engrossed inspection of the musty document. "He carried it, he treasured it. Dead! the detective silenced, 407 out of my path for ever—what is the next step?"

He answered the query by drawing before him a blank telegraph form.

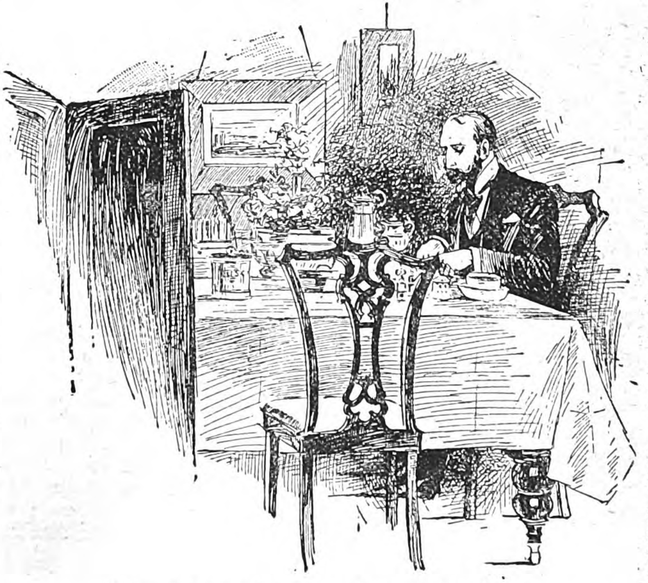
Across its surface he hastily traced the following lines:

"*Col. Lytle.—Come. Coast clear at last.*"

Signing only his initials, and appending the city address of the friend to whom the message was directed, Richard Sheldon rang for a servant, ordered the immediate transmission of the message, and proceeded to enjoy his rather late breakfast.

At two o'clock that same afternoon a lithe, wiry man of about forty rang at the front door of Mr. Sheldon's residence.

He bore a contrast to Sheldon only as one beast of prey differs from another of a different species. The never-resting eyes bespoke more will and daring, but no more cunning and craftiness than those of the master spirit who had summoned him, and who sat awaiting him in his favourite chamber of council and lounge, the library.



Proceeded to enjoy his rather late breakfast.

Colonel Lytle held in his hand, crumpled up, the telegram that had summoned him. He nodded at his host with easy familiarity, his small bead-like eyes studying his face keenly. Mechanically waving the bit of paper, he remarked inquiringly:

"You sent for me—you have learned something?"

"As the telegram tells you, the coast is clear," replied Sheldon.

"You mean——"

"Convict No. 407 is dead."

"Dead!" echoed the other, starting up from his seat.

"Yes. He was cornered by the man I employed."

"Detective Dean?"

"The same. Cornered; he hid in a boat. It took fire—sunk. That is the last of Adrian Burgoyne."

Lytle looked grave. The intelligence not only shocked but seemed to depress him.

"That makes a bad complication," he remarked, after a thoughtful pause.

"How?"

"For five years your one hope has been that this man would reveal the secret you wished to learn. Failing to do that——"

"Wait!" interrupted Sheldon, going to the doors and windows in turn, and closing them securely. "It is well, at this vital stage of the case, for you and I to consider seriously its manifold issues. There need be no quibbles of expression between two men who have been so necessary each to the other as you and I for the past six years."

"Scarcely," smiled Lytle, "seeing that such a friendship has made of you a millionaire, and, as well, regally supplied my own expensive wants."

"Very good, then. About five years since I was a struggling lawyer, you a penniless police-court bailiff. Hardship had almost made me forget that I ever had decent connections. The fact was revived one day, however, in a most remarkable manner."

"You mean by the appearance of Adrian Burgoyne?"

"Don't interrupt me! Of course I mean him," spoke Sheldon somewhat testily. "Years before, a warm friend of my father, Ralph Ringold, had gone to Mexico. There, under high official patronage, he acquired prestige and wealth. His wife died and he sent his daughter and only child to the care of the matron of a young ladies' school near this city. An insurrection arose in the province where he resided. He was compelled to fly for his life. Gathering together what available funds and valuables he could readily reach, he fled at night. Pursued, he was attacked, shot from his horse, but managed to creep to the hacienda of a friend. That friend was an Englishman who had settled there, and who was named Adrian Burgoyne."

"Convict 407."

"Exactly. Dying, Ralph Ringold bade this young man hasten north, to escape the coming of the insurgents, to convey to his old-time friend and confident, Richard Sheldon, a message."

"Yourself?"

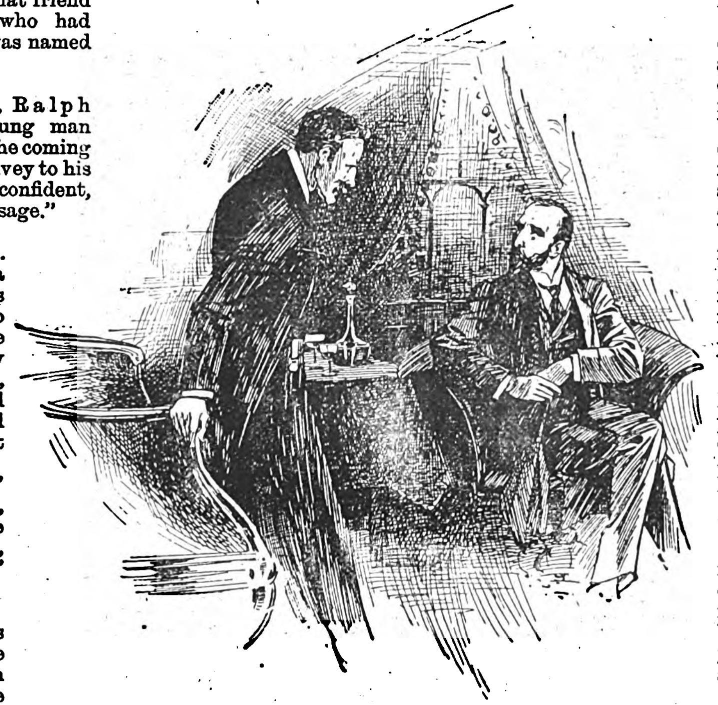
"Yes. Burgoyne came. He placed in my hands a packet, of the contents of which he professed to be ignorant. He said he would call the next day and bring a sealed letter, which his friend Ringold had told him contained a weighty, an important secret."

"After he was gone," interpolated the Colonel, stroking his moustache with a sinister smile, "we opened the packet."

"We did."

"And found?"

"Six thousand pounds in bank notes—all the available funds Ralph Ringold had been able to lay his hands on in the haste of flight."



"Dead!" echoed the other, starting up from his seat.

"Which was quite a startler for us," remarked Lytle.

"A startler?" echoed Sheldon, with animation. "Rather a providence, a windfall, a tempter, the nucleus of mighty wealth. Think what six thousand pounds meant to two impecunious adventurers like you and me, grubbing for our next meal—often forced within bare touch of the threshold of a prison!"

"That money we counted."

"And appropriated," interrupted Sheldon bluntly. "We found a letter accompanying it. The name of my friend, Ralph Ringold, was signed to it. Dying, he implored me in that hasty scrawl, to care, first, last, and always for his orphaned daughter—Patrice. She was at school—he wrote me where. He made me guardian of her fortune—he placed entire trust in me. She had no friends, no relatives. He had none, and Burgoyne was simply a chance acquaintance, who knew little of his affairs, and who, after delivering the package, he stated, would depart on his way."

"Ah, there was where we blundered," sighed the Colonel dolorously.

"How?"

"By arousing his suspicions."

"True. We at once decided to benefit personally by the trust reposed in our hands. We decided to visit the daughter of the dead man, inform her of his death, and tell her she was a pauper, as well as an orphan. That was your task. To end two diverging lines of our plans, we will say that Patrice was removed to the charge of a lonely widow, by you, who has since been paid so much a year to care for her. As to the money, that I invested in trade. Who says opportunity does not make the man? In two years I doubled it; in four I was independently rich."

"And in five," remarked Lytle, with a covert sneer, "puff! you tackled the Stock Exchange. What would people say, the staid conservative mercantile community, if they knew that the honest and enterprising Robert Sheldon was flying financial kites made of the rottenest of all rotten negotiable paper, and on the verge of bankruptcy?"

"Silence!" cried the other, his hands beating a nervous tattoo on the desk at his side. "That is an up-and-down of business all men encounter, and one we must ride over. It is the resolve to fight my way out of my difficulties that bids me believe an easy method lies before us. But, to return to the main branch of our narrative, the next day Adrian Burgoyne returned."

"To overhear you and I discussing our cool projects for fleecing the orphan and feathering our own nest," spoke Lytle coarsely.

Sheldon winced at the blunt allusion.

"About that," he confessed. "He heard enough to unmask us in our true colours. He burst in upon us like a young hurricane. He accused us of meditated villainy; he demanded back the packet. He threatened to appeal to the law. He insisted on knowing the whereabouts of Patrice Ringold. He gave us ten days in which to surrender our trust, and left my office—"

"A marked man. We had money and influence. We set an unscrupulous hireling in our pay on his tracks. He was duped, decoyed. By a lucky accident for us, he was drawn into a meeting of anarchists. During a hot discussion a man was killed. We saw our chance. We suborned witnesses, and circumstances aided us. Adrian Burgoyne was convicted of the crime, was branded as a dangerous revolutionist from Mexico, and became convict No. 407 with a life sentence."

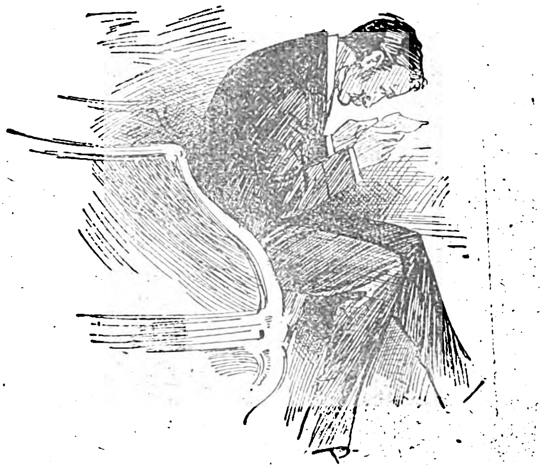
"And then," resumed Sheldon, taking up the thread of the narrative, "we felt safe. We had silenced him. We had entangled him in a net, through the strong meshes of which it was impossible for him to break. We surrounded him, through bribery, with extra precautions, so he could not communicate with the authorities. We broke his spirit. We destroyed his usefulness as an active foe, until—"

"We learnt the truth."

"Yes, by discovering pencilled on a paper in the packet we had overlooked a last communication from dying Ralph Ringold. This is it. I have preserved it."

From a secret drawer in the desk the merchant drew forth a yellow, time-worn sheet of paper. He handed it to his companion, who for the fiftieth time perused it.

"You have my instructions, my dear Sheldon," it ran, "but there is something else. See first to Patrice, for her welfare is my dying thought; but when you have seen her in safe hands and given her the ready money saved from the wreck of my possessions here, I have another mission for you to execute. The six thousand pounds is a paltry nothing compared to the immense fortune I possess besides. I have given to young Burgoyne, secured in a little rubber pouch, a chronicle of the hiding place of this larger fortune, which I dare not trust to write out here. He will hand it to you. Follow its directions. As soon as the insurrection is over come at once to Mexico and secure this treasure, which in my flight I dared not bring, which I could not reach in time. The secret document in the rubber pouch will tell you all. It is the key to wealth that will make my darling Patrice heiress to a fortune beside which that of a Rothschild—"



For the fiftieth time he perused it.

Age and wear had blurred the remainder of the pencilled scrawl. Perhaps approaching dissolution had unnerved the fingers of the dying man as he wrote it.

"That letter aroused us to fresh exertions," proceeded Sheldon.

"We were satisfied that Burgoyne had the rubber pouch packet containing the clue to the hiding place of an immense fortune; that he had hidden it; was withholding it to baffle us. We interviewed him in prison. Defiantly he boasted of a knowledge of the clue. Since then, by every means, we have searched for the clue, we have coaxed and menaced Burgoyne alternatively. We employed that keen-witted detective, Dean, to endeavour to gain his confidence and secure it."

"And all in vain?"

"Yes, until to-day."

"Ha!"

Colonel Lytle sprang from his seat as if shot.

"I understand," he murmured, in an intense tone, between his pursed lips. "That is why you have sent for me."

"Exactly," replied Sheldon, a triumphant smile on his thin lips.

"You telegraphed: 'The coast is clear.'"

"Meaning that our only foe, Burgoyne, is dead, yes."

"And you have—"

"The clue."

"Sure?"

"Beyond the peradventure of a doubt."

"Where—how—when did you get it?" panted the excited Lytle.

"From the detective, Dean—only to-day—I bought it—price £2,000."

"Phew! it comes high."

"But is invaluable. Yes, Lytle," went on the other, in a quiver with excitement and delight commingled, "the key to Ralph Ringold's hidden fortune is in my possession at last!"

"Show it to me."

Hard, cracked and dry was the eager voice; elfish, sinister and gloating the evil face of the merchant's ally and accomplice.

From his pocket Richard Sheldon drew the self-same bit of parchment that the detective had sold to him for a small fortune earlier in the day.

He spread it out carefully, daintily. He gloated over it.

A jumble of strange signs, of incongruous curves, dashes and lines, a scrawl in peculiar hieroglyphics—at it Colonel Lytle fairly glared.

"Why!" he exploded, "it's indecipherable!"

"Is it?" smiled the sanguine Sheldon. "It was written for a purpose, was it not?"

"Certainly."

"It is the key, the one existing clue, to the Ringold fortune."

"I will admit that."

"Then do not say that it is indecipherable. There lies my only hope of retrieving my fallen fortunes—of reigning a social and financial monarch."

"But its import—the key?" queried the incredulous Lytle.

"The key?" repeated Sheldon. "Ah, look on the back!"

He turned the bit of parchment over as he spoke.

A single line in pencil, barely intelligible, looked up at the eager inspecting eyes of Colonel Lytle.

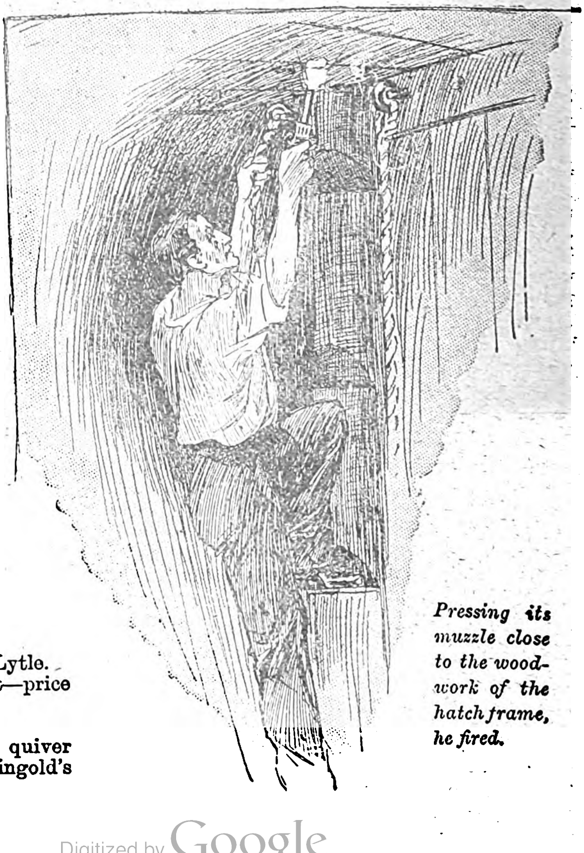
And it read:

"My daughter Patrice has the key to this cryptogram."

CHAPTER VI.

THE VICTIM OF A CRIME.

THE mists hung heavily over land and lake. Like winding sheets or a drifting pall, the tangible wreaths of vapour took to themselves fantastic shapes.



Pressing its muzzle close to the woodwork of the hatch frame, he fired.

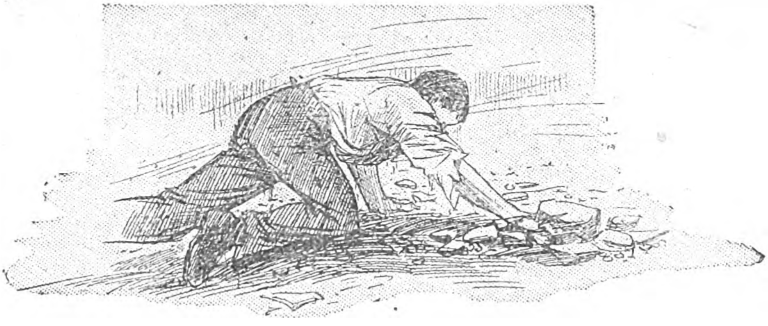
South from the vast park area, where the domes of the magnificent World's Fair buildings loomed up like airy fabrics of fairyland, the beach rounded sharply to the south. Here grew a dense line of evergreens, stunted and sparse in stature and foliage.

One clump, almost at the very water's edge, resembled a mound, its sharp, jagged edges of outline being the sport and play of spray and mist alike.

Suddenly from this bank of blank there was a movement. A form moved, crept out upon the sandy beach, struggled to an erect position, and glared about in perplexity and terror.

The figure was that of a man, but so forlorn in face and raiment that one might imagine he had been the victim of some battle, a lone refugee from some deadly combat.

It was true. He had indeed been the victim of a conflict so terrible that, as the rising sun dispelled the mists slowly, the refreshing air seemed to clear his dazed brain as well, and with a shudder he gazed seaward, haunted with the memory of a battle, indeed—a long-handed, desperate warfare with the giant forces of Nature.



He had crawled up on the beach.

"Alive—saved—here!" he ejaculated, each word being spoken painfully and slow. "It is destiny—fate—providence!"

Yes, fire and blood has passed him by—he recalled the experience with a shiver; the hands of justice had unclenched their cruel, mailed fingers. Outcast from the very elements, alien on a home shore, wrecked in port, his thoughts overpowered him, and he sank to the sandy beach, mute, marvelling, exhausted.

As he shrank there, in the pitiful attire, the hollow face, the weird, haunted eyes, there was that which told of a mind benumbed coming back to life with a shock.

So long did he stare at the lake, so often did his thin, trembling hand go up to his clouded brow in a dreamy, uncertain way, that it seemed as if the old lethargy was once again taking possession of his senses.

Abruptly, however, a shrill whistle, as of some steamer off on the water, aroused him with a shock, announcing the proximity of human beings. As if his hand was against every man's and every man's hand against him, he sprang to his feet, limped back to cover, with one inexplicable gesture towards the dashing waves that beat their spray full over him, and the far more inexplicable cry:

"Dead!—they think me dead—drowned! Convict 407 lies *there!*"

With almost an hysterical laugh he pointed to the lake. Then he crept in among the dense evergreens, over gnarled roots, and under low drooping branches, nor rested until he was ensconced in the very heart of that jungle-like thicket.

No. 407? Yes, the refugee of the prison, the fugitive from Dormitory D., Robert Lane, the victim of one of the foulest crimes of the nineteenth century, had escaped!

Lying there, with half closed eyes, physical pains, mental suffering were subdued to indifferent languor, as, vividly, rapidly, before his vision seemed to pass impressive portraitures of the occurrences of the past six hours.

Like a being fighting hard for life and liberty against banded superior numbers, the real peril, the real struggle had begun when Adrian Burgoyne found himself, by his own desperate act, adrift on turbulent waters, shut in securely to the dismal hold of the barge, with a fierce ravenous fire raging the width of a plank overhead.

There was one aperture only beside the battened-down hatch—the little window at the stern, through which he had reached to cut the cable securing the craft ashore.

Little, indeed, he found it as he sought vainly to crowd through it. The four by six aperture would not admit the passage of a child.

In a frenzy of dread and desperation he had climbed the notched post. With all the strength of which he was capable he pressed his shoulders against the hatch cover. He failed to move it more than an inch, and then the clank of the iron bar rattling in its loose fastenings told how futile were his weak efforts against that formidable barrier.

Through the chinks about the cover, too, he could see the encroaching flames, the dense smoke. The fierce crackling of the tinder-like *débris* on deck sounded like the knell of doom.

"Oh, it is horrible," he panted, "to be shut in here, helpless, to smother, scorch! I *must* escape! I *will not* die!"

He endeavoured to fix the position of the hasp-fastening of the iron bar that held the hatch cover down. His one weapon was a revolver. It must be employed as a tool now. Pressing its muzzle close to the woodwork of the hatch frame, he fired.

Bang—bang—bang—bang—bang—bang—bang! The seven reports rang out in deafening dissonance in that smoke-clouded, confined hold; with every explosion a shock ran up his arm and thrilled his frame. Then eagerly he flared a match, and pressed eyes and hands close to the woodwork.

"Courage, success!" breathed the beleaguered victim of direful peril.

Powder and ball had shattered a portion of the framework. He could look through, he could reach through, the aperture. His trembling fingers rested on the iron bar. With a splinter of wood he began working at the hasp, holding it in place—an extra push, there was a clang like falling manacles, and he was free.

With half a cheer on his excited lips the convict thrust up the hatch cover. A shower of cinders beat about his head and shoulders like hail: a swift searing tongue of flame twisted about him like a shroud.

He wavered as he gained the deck. Fire encircled him. He grasped the heavy hatch cover. Holding it as a shield in the direction where the fire beat the fiercest, he struggled to the side of the craft.

His clothing was on fire in a dozen places, his hands and face were blistered, every vestige of hair on face and head was crisped to cinders ere he reached the water's edge.

He seemed to be inhaling draughts of liquid fire. Without hesitation, holding the hatch-cover in a fainting grasp, he hurled himself sheer into the lake.

Then coolness, Heaven after Hades, a sense of safety, and he drifted, as his float drifted, away from the blazing craft, and out into the gloom and darkness of a storm-beaten sea.

How, when, where he reached land, he did not realise. Somehow he had crawled up the beach, and presently came to the shelter of the dense evergreens that now ensconced him.

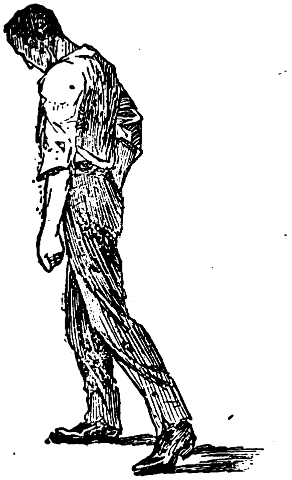
He was adjudged dead—drowned; the relentless pursuit of justice had ceased. It was that thought which acted as a sedative to restlessness and dread. It illumined his face with hope, it drove anxiety from his mind, it admitted of his taking the perfect rest his forlorn condition demanded.

Impervious to chill, damp, hunger, and thirst, the old Robert Lane, the real Adrian Burgoyne, reflected over the past with a set, resentful face, considered the present with grim resignation and patience, groped into the future with a soul, bitter, resolute, uncompromising.

All day long within him a great mental battle raged. Thoughts, terrible, pathetic, pitiful, by turn, excited, aroused, and depressed him. The shades of dusk haunted the landscape ere he ventured from his hiding-place.

His injured foot still pained him, and he limped badly. He was weak from hunger. Wild-eyed, he scanned the lake and its long circular sweep of beach. With a shudder he regarded the straggling outposts of the city that had lured him to a magnet-like embrace, only to crush and destroy his hopes, his happiness, his ambitions.

He turned his back upon it, with a bitter, resentful sigh; he fixed his glance across the sandy beaches beyond which lay the great factories and mills.



The past was dead; the world was all before him!

From one of these, far round the curve of the beach glowed, like a sinister star of light, the mouth of some great blast furnace.

Like an evil eye, it fascinated and guided him. He started towards it.

Once only he paused. It was at the apex of a great sand ridge. Like some gaunt, weird watchman of the desolate spot, he glanced back at the blur of light against the northern heavens, marking the World's Fair grounds, melting into the city beyond.

The enterprise, the turmoil, the dash, the spirit of man's mighty ambitions were typified there, but in the charmed circle, he, refugee, outcast, convict, had no place. Danger lurked there. In its dark lair, grim, ravenous, ever watchful, the law menaced him. With a despairing wave of his hand, Adrian Burgoyne seemed to bid adieu to it all.

Resolutely he set his face towards the humbler temples of toil, the woods beyond, the green pastures, the still waters.

The past was dead; the world was all before him!

For good or for bad—which?

(To be continued.)

We learn that in Short Stories, dated October 5th, we inserted a story which we entitled "A Waif from the Eternal City," and which, under the name of "The Chief Constable's Dream," was the copyright of Miss C. K. Alexander. The story was sent to us in the ordinary way, and we had no idea we were publishing something that was not original. We much regret the annoyance we have inadvertently caused Miss C. K. Alexander by inserting the story in our paper without her consent.

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This issue of *P.W.* will contain, in addition to the regular features, a grand instalment of our new serial story, to which reference is made above, splendid complete stories by William Le Queux and Sophie Hart, and the Horoscope of the Editor of *S.S.*

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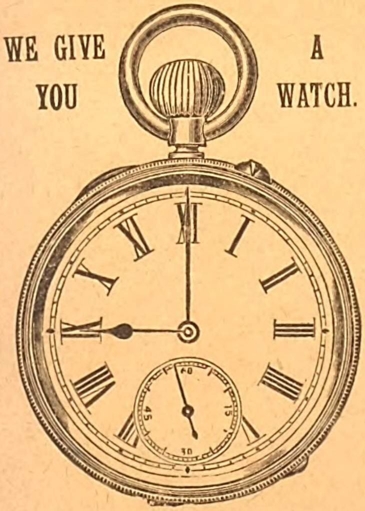

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EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 365. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 28TH, 1895. [TWOPENCE.

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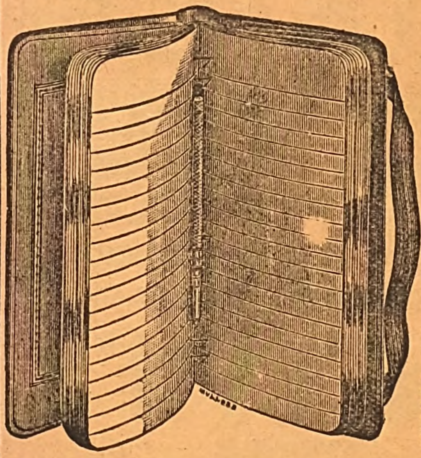

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No. 365.] For the Week Ending December 28th, 1895. [Two Pence.

ANTHONY FOX

SHORT STORIES

THE MAN AFRAID OF FLIES

AMONG the many peculiarities which Captain Clagg, a unique person in this world, possessed there was one more fantastic and ridiculous than all the rest. Captain Clagg, an old sea dog whom neither tempests, death, nor cannon had ever made wink an eye, *was afraid of flies !*

My first feeling, when I noticed this singularity, was to laugh heartily —thinking it a good joke. But when I saw how pained and mortified he was at my ridicule, I determined never to allude to it again. One can explain these absurdities in people of a highly nervous temperament, but Captain Clagg had not a delicate or nervous organisation; I felt sure there was some mystery under this peculiarity. I was not mistaken; and the secret was revealed to me one morning when we were taking breakfast together at a coffee house in Plymouth.

It was a lovely day just before Christmas. We had a fire in the room; but the air was so soft and balmy that we had breakfasted with the windows open. After a little, however, feeling a slight chill, we closed the windows, lighted our cigars, and began to talk of the Captain's last voyage to Africa.

"You don't know the people of Zanguebar," he said. "The men are the bravest soldiers, the women—hark! what is that? Didn't you hear something?" He looked hastily round.

I listened. "No." I could hear nothing.

"Ah! you heard that," he repeated, placing his hand upon my arm. "There it is again! Now you heard it!" gazing with frightened eyes at a distant corner of the room, where a shrill buzzing, a kind of jerky singing, was distinctly heard. "It is there, watching us, waiting to dart upon us. I recognise the buzzing, and if it but touches us we are dead men."

Beginning to be a little alarmed, I said: "What is it? I see nothing."

"For your life, don't move; let me kill it," said the Captain. Seizing a napkin from the table and wrapping it round his hand, he crept towards the spot where he heard the buzzing. There he stopped, and turning to me, said: "Wrap something round your hand, and come here softly."

I did as directed, and going towards him, said: "What is it?"

"Hush! be quiet! don't you see it? there it is, resting—look."

Then I saw the object of all this excitement—*a fly sitting on the wall.*

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My first impulse was to laugh, but Clagg was so pale and excited that the terrible thought came to my mind, "He is mad;" but I merely said: "What! that fly?"

He answered in a low voice: "Hush! be careful; we must crush it. You strike at the same time as I do, and we may be fortunate enough to kill it." We steathily drew near. Our hands came down upon the wall as in a single blow. The fly soared away unharmed, and alighted on the table.

"Missed it!" muttered Clagg. "We are lost."

"Lost!" I exclaimed. "What, for a fly?"

"Yes," he replied; "that is the Black Fly; one touch of its deadly wings is death—death of the most loathsome kind."

"But we are not obliged to stay here, Captain; let us open the door and go out," I said.

"What! open the door and let it escape to poison all Plymouth, and perhaps breed others? No, you can go if you choose, but I have too much respect for you to believe you capable of such cowardice."

Without saying another word he aimed a fearful blow at the fly resting on the table. It flew away to the window. Then commenced a terrible combat. Captain Clagg was no longer a man, but a savage beast, with flaming eyes and features distorted with rage—leaping, bounding from one end of the room to the other, climbing upon the furniture, upsetting it, breaking it in his pursuit of that flitting creature which appeared to take a wicked pleasure in eluding him; in truth, it seemed as if some infernal spirit possessed that fly and directed its flight.

When Clagg's hand could almost touch it, away it flew to the further end of the room. When he climbed on the table to reach it on the ceiling, presto! it was on the floor. At first I tried to join in the chase, but the leaps and bounds of the Captain were so fast and furious that I was run against and upset two or three times. I finally concluded that it was best to remain in one corner and wait for the fly to come my way.

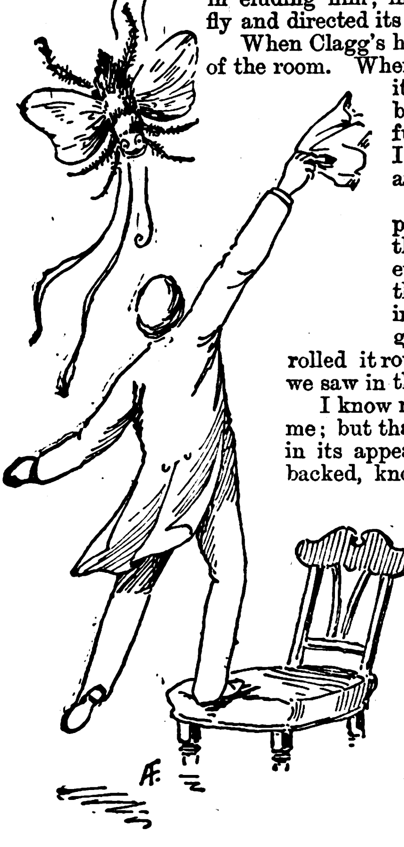
Gradually Clagg became more tranquil, and seemed disposed to try patience and strategy. He persistently followed the fly, and did not allow it to rest a moment. It was evidently becoming weary. A profound silence reigned in the room, broken only by the continuous buzzing of the insect as it flew from place to place. Suddenly the Captain gave a roar of triumph as his hand struck the table; he rolled it round two or three times with all his might; then, raising it, we saw in the folded napkin the crushed form of the Black Fly.

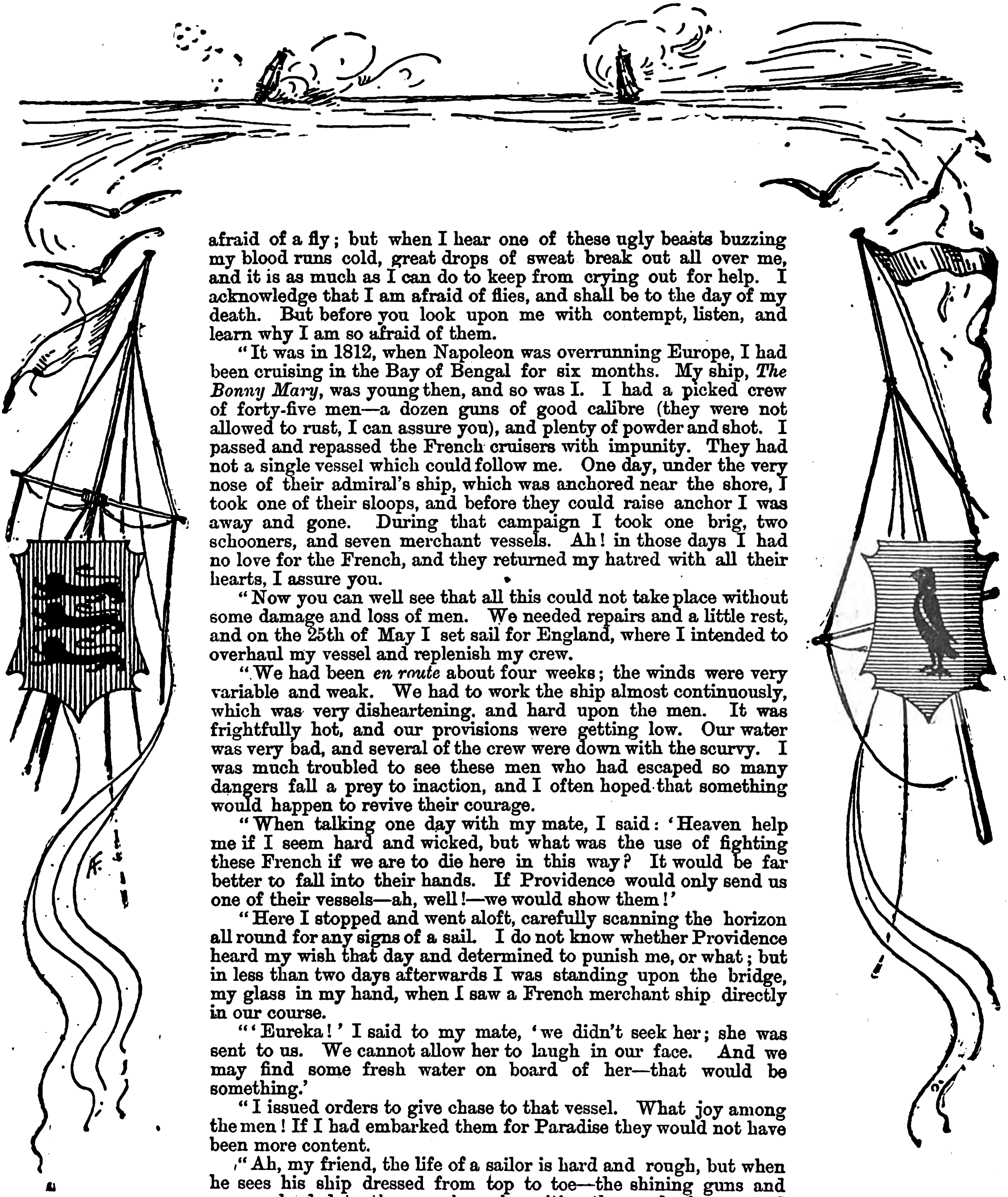
I know not how much the scene which I had witnessed had excited me; but that miserable insect had something so sinister and venomous in its appearance that it made me shudder. It was very large, humpbacked, knotty, and bristling with hairy protuberances; in truth, it looked like a living poison.

Clagg, with bent head, silently regarded it; a kind of savage melancholy succeeded the tempest of fury which had possessed him; his eyes had a saddened look, as if evoked by tragic memories. He remained thus a few moments without speaking, every now and then passing his hand over his brow, as if something troubled him.

"Ah, my friend," said I, affectionately taking his hand, "can't you tell me what it is?"

In a low voice he replied: "After what you have seen, you can understand how afraid I am of flies. To-day is not the first time you have noticed it; but for shame I would have explained it long ago. You know it is not an easy thing for Captain Clagg to confess that he is





afraid of a fly; but when I hear one of these ugly beasts buzzing my blood runs cold, great drops of sweat break out all over me, and it is as much as I can do to keep from crying out for help. I acknowledge that I am afraid of flies, and shall be to the day of my death. But before you look upon me with contempt, listen, and learn why I am so afraid of them.

"It was in 1812, when Napoleon was overrunning Europe, I had been cruising in the Bay of Bengal for six months. My ship, *The Bonny Mary*, was young then, and so was I. I had a picked crew of forty-five men—a dozen guns of good calibre (they were not allowed to rust, I can assure you), and plenty of powder and shot. I passed and repassed the French cruisers with impunity. They had not a single vessel which could follow me. One day, under the very nose of their admiral's ship, which was anchored near the shore, I took one of their sloops, and before they could raise anchor I was away and gone. During that campaign I took one brig, two schooners, and seven merchant vessels. Ah! in those days I had no love for the French, and they returned my hatred with all their hearts, I assure you.

"Now you can well see that all this could not take place without some damage and loss of men. We needed repairs and a little rest, and on the 25th of May I set sail for England, where I intended to overhaul my vessel and replenish my crew.

"We had been *en route* about four weeks; the winds were very variable and weak. We had to work the ship almost continuously, which was very disheartening, and hard upon the men. It was frightfully hot, and our provisions were getting low. Our water was very bad, and several of the crew were down with the scurvy. I was much troubled to see these men who had escaped so many dangers fall a prey to inaction, and I often hoped that something would happen to revive their courage.

"When talking one day with my mate, I said: 'Heaven help me if I seem hard and wicked, but what was the use of fighting these French if we are to die here in this way? It would be far better to fall into their hands. If Providence would only send us one of their vessels—ah, well!—we would show them!'

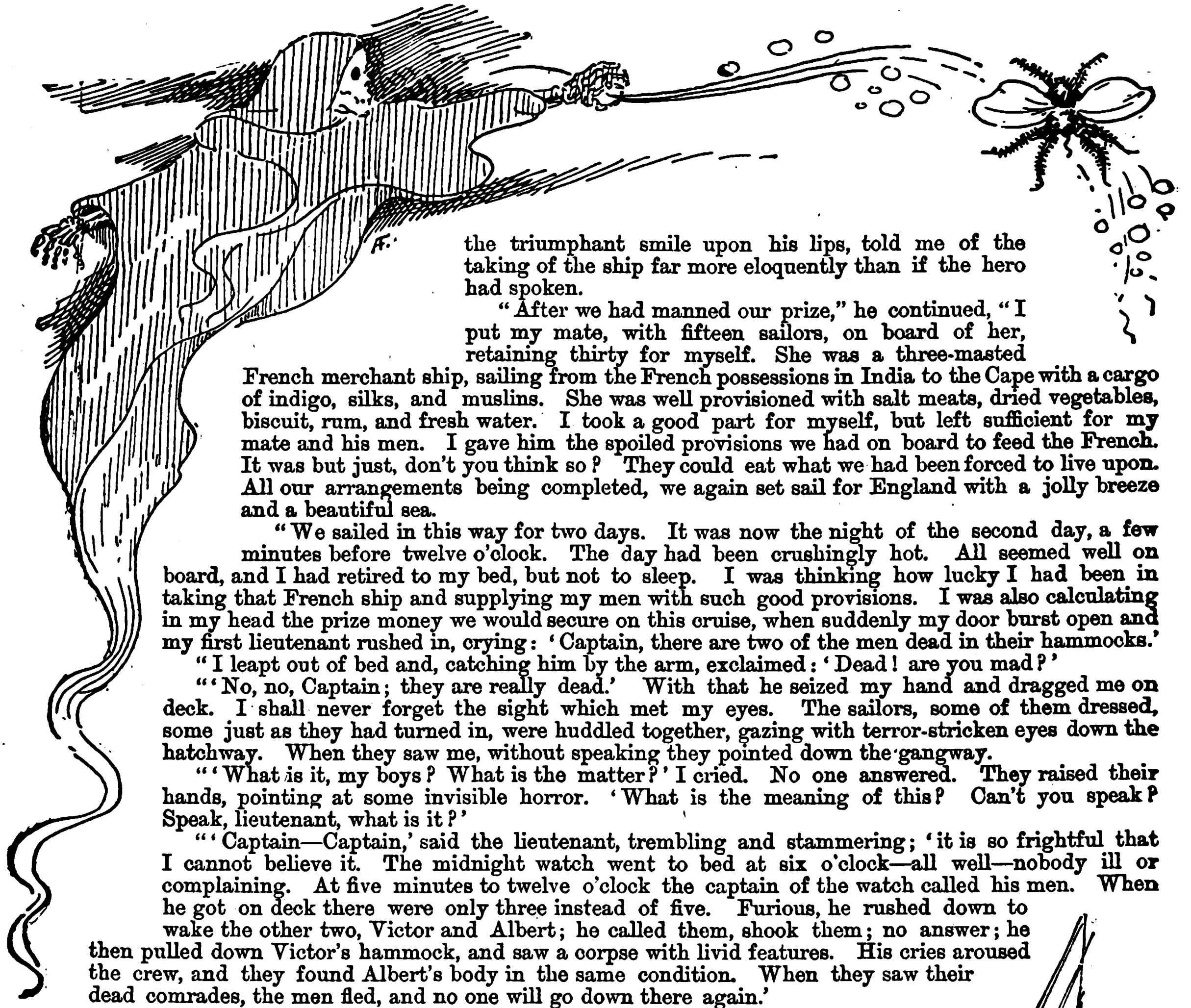
"Here I stopped and went aloft, carefully scanning the horizon all round for any signs of a sail. I do not know whether Providence heard my wish that day and determined to punish me, or what; but in less than two days afterwards I was standing upon the bridge, my glass in my hand, when I saw a French merchant ship directly in our course.

"'Eureka!' I said to my mate, 'we didn't seek her; she was sent to us. We cannot allow her to laugh in our face. And we may find some fresh water on board of her—that would be something.'

"I issued orders to give chase to that vessel. What joy among the men! If I had embarked them for Paradise they would not have been more content.

"Ah, my friend, the life of a sailor is hard and rough, but when he sees his ship dressed from top to toe—the shining guns and cannon loaded to the muzzle, only waiting the word of command to vomit forth a rain of grape and canister—grappling-irons and boarding-knives all ready—with forty good men, armed to the teeth, eager for the fray, like tigers scenting blood afar off—ah!"—here the Captain brushed off a tear with his hand—"it brings a thrill, an emotion no other people can know."

He was silent for a moment. He never liked to give the details of his battles; it was a way of showing his modesty. But I lost nothing, thanks to the mobility of his face. His flashing eye and frowning brow, above all



the triumphant smile upon his lips, told me of the taking of the ship far more eloquently than if the hero had spoken.

"After we had manned our prize," he continued, "I put my mate, with fifteen sailors, on board of her, retaining thirty for myself. She was a three-masted French merchant ship, sailing from the French possessions in India to the Cape with a cargo of indigo, silks, and muslins. She was well provisioned with salt meats, dried vegetables, biscuit, rum, and fresh water. I took a good part for myself, but left sufficient for my mate and his men. I gave him the spoiled provisions we had on board to feed the French. It was but just, don't you think so? They could eat what we had been forced to live upon. All our arrangements being completed, we again set sail for England with a jolly breeze and a beautiful sea.

"We sailed in this way for two days. It was now the night of the second day, a few minutes before twelve o'clock. The day had been crushingly hot. All seemed well on board, and I had retired to my bed, but not to sleep. I was thinking how lucky I had been in taking that French ship and supplying my men with such good provisions. I was also calculating in my head the prize money we would secure on this cruise, when suddenly my door burst open and my first lieutenant rushed in, crying: 'Captain, there are two of the men dead in their hammocks.'

"I leapt out of bed and, catching him by the arm, exclaimed: 'Dead! are you mad?'

"'No, no, Captain; they are really dead.' With that he seized my hand and dragged me on deck. I shall never forget the sight which met my eyes. The sailors, some of them dressed, some just as they had turned in, were huddled together, gazing with terror-stricken eyes down the hatchway. When they saw me, without speaking they pointed down the gangway.

"'What is it, my boys? What is the matter?' I cried. No one answered. They raised their hands, pointing at some invisible horror. 'What is the meaning of this? Can't you speak? Speak, lieutenant, what is it?'

"'Captain—Captain,' said the lieutenant, trembling and stammering; 'it is so frightful that I cannot believe it. The midnight watch went to bed at six o'clock—all well—nobody ill or complaining. At five minutes to twelve o'clock the captain of the watch called his men. When he got on deck there were only three instead of five. Furious, he rushed down to wake the other two, Victor and Albert; he called them, shook them; no answer; he then pulled down Victor's hammock, and saw a corpse with livid features. His cries aroused the crew, and they found Albert's body in the same condition. When they saw their dead comrades, the men fled, and no one will go down there again.'

"'Bring me a lantern,' I said, and, accompanied by my lieutenant, I descended the hatchway. I raised the lantern to the face of one of the dead men; the sight was so awful that the lantern slipped from my hand, and, falling to the floor, was extinguished. We were now in total darkness. The lieutenant and I began to feel for the lantern. The idea of being in the dark with these horrible bodies made his teeth chatter, as well as mine. Groping with my hands stretched out, I suddenly heard, just over my head, a kind of buzzing. In a situation like this, my friend, everything takes a sinister aspect. I thought: 'Perhaps it is the soul of one of these poor men who died without confession, asking us for our prayers.' But I only said: 'Is that you, breathing in that way, lieutenant?'

"'No, Captain, I thought it was you. May be it is a cockroach.'

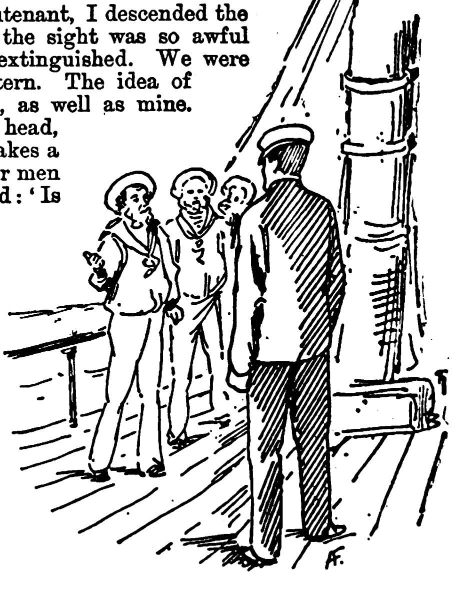
"'No, it is not a cockroach. Who ever heard of a roach buzzing like that?'

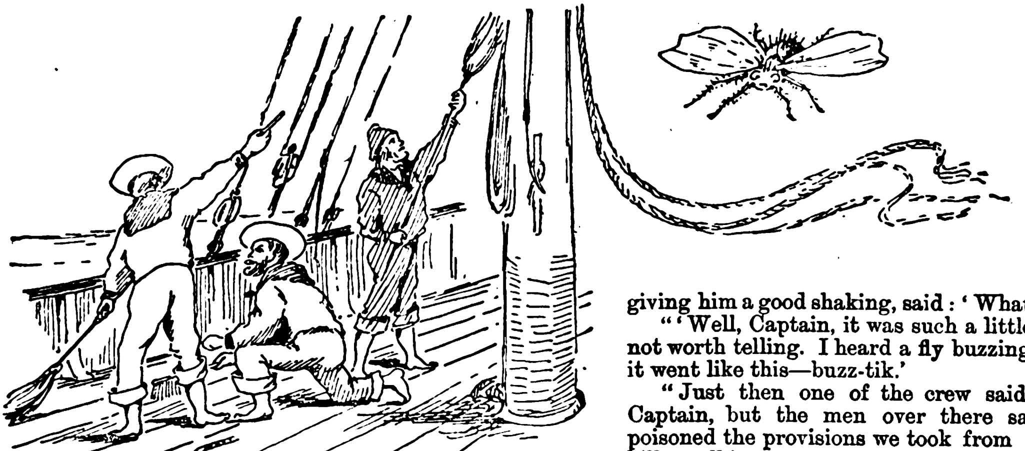
"'Oh!' cried the lieutenant, 'something stung me on the lip. How it burns!'

"Just then I put my hand on the lantern, and said: 'Come, let us go up. We must have these poor men carried away.'

"When I got on deck, I immediately questioned the crew—interrogated every sailor, one after the other. It was impossible to learn how these men had died. I said: 'Were none of you awake during the six hours before the watch? Did you hear nothing?'

"They nudged each other and shrugged their shoulders, but said not a word. Finally I saw one of them shaking his head as if he wished to speak. 'Ah! you heard something. What was it?'





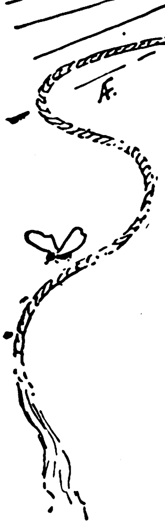
"'Captain, ah! yes. I heard—I am sure I heard something. Maybe it was a dream, but as sure as you see my hand, I heard——'

"Here I caught him by the collar and, giving him a good shaking, said: 'What did you hear?'

"'Well, Captain, it was such a little thing that it is not worth telling. I heard a fly buzzing—a big fly, too; it went like this—buzz-tik.'

"Just then one of the crew said: 'Excuse me, Captain, but the men over there say the French poisoned the provisions we took from them, so as to kill us all.'

"Ah! this was a blow. Could those poor fellows have been poisoned? No; that was impossible. We had been living on the food taken from the French vessel for two days; if that were so, we should all have been dead by this time.



"'Poisoned!' I exclaimed, 'Do you think a sailor, no matter under what flag he sails, could be guilty of such infamy?'

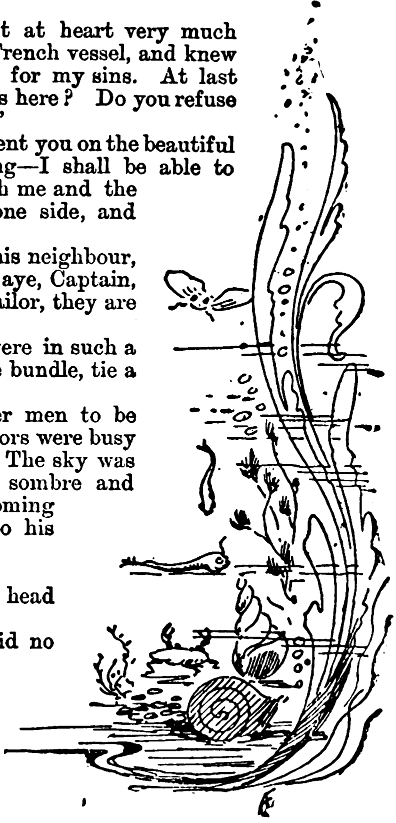
"'No, no; the Captain is right,' they all cried out with one voice.

"'Now, my boys, you know death comes to us all some time or other, and when the time comes we must go; the hour has come for our comrades. Let us say Mass for the repose of their souls, then cast them into the sea. Who will go down and help me bring up the dead bodies?'

"Nobody spoke. They drew back, casting frightened looks down the hatchway. I saw they were wild with fear, and said to myself: 'If I am rough with them, they may lose their heads altogether and mutiny.'

"I stood a few moments coolly regarding them, but at heart very much worried. I regretted the day I had wished to meet a French vessel, and knew Providence had sent that merchant ship as a punishment for my sins. At last an idea came to me. I said: 'Are there no good comrades here? Do you refuse to give these poor men the burial you would give a dog?'

"Scornfully looking at them, I continued: 'I compliment you on the beautiful account I shall give of you in my log-book. Another thing—I shall be able to count the cowards. All of you who dare not go down with me and the lieutenant, to bring up your poor comrades, will stand on one side, and leave the brave sailors on the other.'



"At these words they all turned round, each one pounding and beating his neighbour, and daring him to be a coward; then, with one voice, they cried out: 'Aye, aye, Captain, we will all go with you.' Ah, my friend! if you only know how to take a sailor, they are brave as lions, but tender as little children.

"I thanked them. Then we started down for the dead bodies. They were in such a condition that we had to roll their hammocks, bed clothes, and all, into one bundle, tie a rope round them, and throw them into the sea.

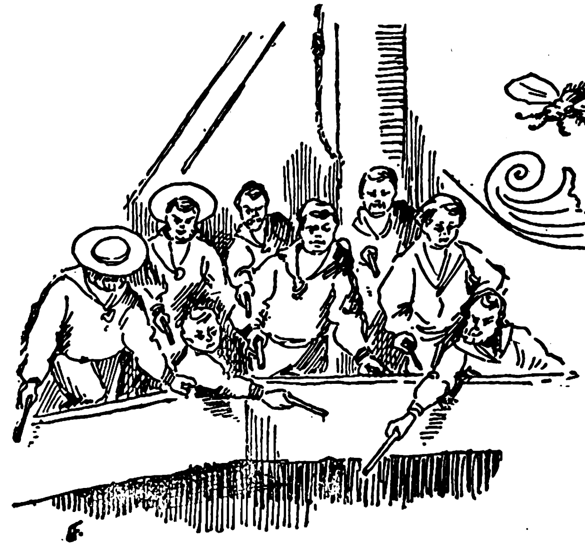
"After this was done, I ordered the hammocks and clothes of the other men to be spread on deck, for fear the disease might prove contagious. While the sailors were busy with this work, I sat on deck, a prey to very sad reflections, I assure you. The sky was covered with heavy clouds; our lanterns only made the darkness more sombre and appalling. The lieutenant was superintending the work, when I saw him coming towards me, staggering and stumbling, and with his handkerchief pressed to his mouth.

"'Well, lieutenant, have you finished?'

"'Not yet, Captain, but I don't know what is the matter with me. My head turns round, my legs give way, and I have an overpowering desire to sleep.'

"He sat down by me, and leaning his head on the back of the seat, said no more.

"We remained thus for some time. The clouds gradually disappeared, the moon came out; I turned to speak to him. I was thunderstruck! His face was black, livid, and terribly swollen, and he seemed asleep. I called him, shook him; he opened his eyes in an unconscious way, and would have fallen to the deck if I had not supported him. I called for help. We carried him to his berth, and did everything we could to save him, but all



in vain; decomposition set in immediately. He died at four o'clock, just as day was breaking.

"There was no doubt about it. The poor boy—he was only twenty-four years old—had died in the same way as the two sailors. The buzzing we had heard, and the sting of which the lieutenant had complained, were due to some venomous insect. Death was concealed in our midst and flying about; we knew not when or where to expect it. What must I do? If I told the crew, they might become demoralised and forsake the ship. If I did not tell them, how could they guard against this deadly thing which might sting and kill them all? It was all my fault, and the fault of that French vessel—what should I do?

"After mature reflection, I concluded that it was best to tell them. I assembled the crew, and after many preambles, so as not to frighten them, I said: 'There is surely a poisonous fly in our midst which has stung our poor comrades and caused their death. We must find that fly and kill it.'

"I made them take rope brooms, and sweep every hole and corner of the ship. Then I retired to my cabin and wrote in my log-book the dismal events of the night.

"Next morning, after putting the hammocks and clothing in place, the men seemed easier, when I suddenly saw three or four sailors run to one of their comrades. I hurried forward to learn what was the matter.

"On seeing me, the man raised his hand with a despairing gesture, and cried out: 'Captain, I am a dead man; the fly has stung me.'

"I ran to him. There was a red spot on his cheek, and in the centre a tiny speck of blood. I carried him to my room, cut open the jaw, let it bleed freely, bathed it in rum, alcohol, and vinegar—even washed the wound with a brush. Then I left him in the care of two sailors, and returned on deck, determined to find this miserable insect which menaced us all.

"It would be useless to tell you the wild ideas which came into my head; all kinds of death and destruction I concocted for this venomous creature; finally, after turning it over and over in my mind, I arranged my plan and gave the necessary orders for its execution.

"I had the fire-pumps placed on deck at the head of the hatchway. I made my men load their pistols to the muzzle with fine shot (I had a good many sacks of this on board for killing birds); then I said: 'Now, my boys, we must kill this deadly fly. We will first wash out the whole ship; then we will try the shot.'

"We worked the pumps a full hour—a flood of water rushing over the decks. Then I said: 'If it is not drowned and is still flying about, we will get him this time.' So I ordered my men to aim their pistols in every direction down the hatchway, and gave the word to fire.

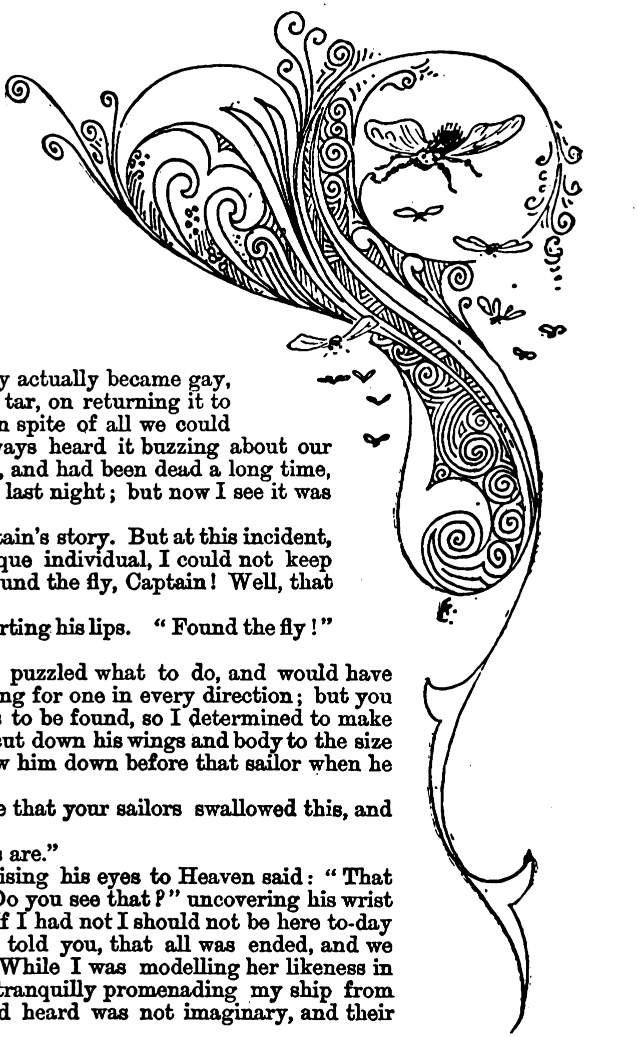
"Thirty pistols went off at the same time. 'If it escaped *that*,' I said, 'he is hard to kill; but I am sure it is dead, either drowned, or shot into a thousand pieces, and the first one who speaks of that fly'—here I significantly tapped the barrel of my pistol. Just then one of the sailors left in charge of the sick man came up to say that his comrade seemed better. To my great surprise he continued to improve, passed a good night, and next day was nearly well.

"It is needless to say that from that time no one dared speak a word of the fly, but it was plainly to be seen that my sailors were no longer the same men; they had an anxious, harassed look, continually watching and looking from right to left, every now and then suddenly stopping to listen. They no longer laughed or told jokes: they were quiet and watchful, like men expecting some concealed danger of which they dared not speak. I saw all were possessed with one idea—the fear of that fly.

"Ah, my friend! you cannot imagine how cruel it was for a Captain to see his men, who in a six months' cruise had taken a brig, two schooners, and seven merchant ships, lose all their courage, all energy, and become as cowardly and timid as little children before a fly—no, not even a fly, but the ghost of a fly. It was fifteen days before we could reach England, and in time of war no one could tell what might happen with a demoralised crew.

"So I must do something, and I thought if I could only show them this fly—let them see it, dead or alive—they would be cured of their folly. But where was I to find a fly? On land, easy enough; but in a ship far out at sea it seemed impossible. Still, this did not prevent me from saying: 'I will find that fly.' Now, who can find if he does not seek?

"I took five men under the pretence of cleaning the ship, and from morning till night, from the helm to the bowsprit, from the keel to the top of the highest mast, there was not a spot or crevice which we did not visit and search. We had worked in this way for nearly a week, when one afternoon I went with these sailors into the



forecastle where the men slept. In one corner there was a heap of old worn-out shirts. I pushed them aside with my foot, and said to a sailor just behind me: 'What is that? I see something black lying on the floor. Is it the end of a cigar? It is not possible that any one has dared smoke here?' The sailor picked up the object and handed it to me. As soon as I saw it, I made the sign of the cross and cried out: 'Thank Heaven we are safe at last! Don't you see that it is that deadly beast—the fly?'

"I rushed on deck, assembled the crew, and, showing it to them, said: 'See how stupid you were, always twisting and craning your heads watching for that fly! You can't conceal anything from me. I saw you, and if I had not by a miracle found the venomous thing, I verily believe you would have gone mad. Now I hope you are satisfied *that it is really dead.*'

"It was droll to see how their faces brightened; they actually became gay, as they took the fly and leisurely examined it. One old tar, on returning it to me, said: 'Ah, Captain! I am so glad you found it, for, in spite of all we could do, we could not keep from thinking of that fly. We always heard it buzzing about our ears, and I declare to you if I did not see that it was dead, and had been dead a long time, I could swear I heard it buzzing at the door of your cabin last night; but now I see it was only a fancy.'"

You can imagine with what interest I followed the Captain's story. But at this incident, so suggestive of the energy and shrewdness of this unique individual, I could not keep from clasping his hand and exclaiming: "And so you found the fly, Captain! Well, that surpasses all!"

He looked at me in a quizzical way, a peculiar smile parting his lips. "Found the fly!" he said. "Do you think so? Well, you shall see.

"I was determined to find it in some way, but terribly puzzled what to do, and would have given a thousand pounds for a fly. I commenced searching for one in every direction; but you can't comb the devil if he has no hair; there were no flies to be found, so I determined to make one. Do you know what I did? I caught a cockroach, cut down his wings and body to the size of a big fly; soaked him in ink, then dried him, and threw him down before that sailor when he was not looking."

"Nonsense, Captain! You don't expect me to believe that your sailors swallowed this, and thought it was the Black Fly?"

"Ah, my friend! you don't know what children sailors are."

Here he gave a long breath, a sigh of remorse, and, raising his eyes to Heaven said: "That fly made me commit a deadly sin, but I was punished. Do you see that?" uncovering his wrist and showing me a deep, round scar. "I did that myself. If I had not I should not be here to-day to tell this story. Perhaps you think, after what I have told you, that all was ended, and we heard no more of the Black Fly. Ah, you shall see. While I was modelling her likeness in the body of my cockroach she was laughing at me and tranquilly promenading my ship from one end to the other. The buzzing which the sailors had heard was not imaginary, and their fancies were only too true.

"About a week after this adventure of the cockroach, I was sitting in my cabin examining my chart, when I heard something buzzing behind my back. I turned round to look. Suddenly I felt something like a needle pierce my left wrist. I gave a quick slap with my right hand, and crushed a great fly like the one you see there. Merciful powers! What should I do? I looked at the spot; it was already red and beginning to swell—a tiny drop of blood in the centre. There was a large sharp knife lying on my table. I seized it, quick as a flash, and with my right hand cut out a great lump of flesh all round the sting. I allowed it to bleed freely, then bathed it in alcohol and ammonia, and bandaged it. Not a word did I breathe to my crew of how I had hurt my hand.

"This fly came from the provisions which I had taken from the French vessel, and never shall I get it out of my head but that it was sent as a punishment for my sin in wishing to encounter one of their ships when there was no necessity for it. You see, when I commit a sin, I do not try to find some one to lay it on."

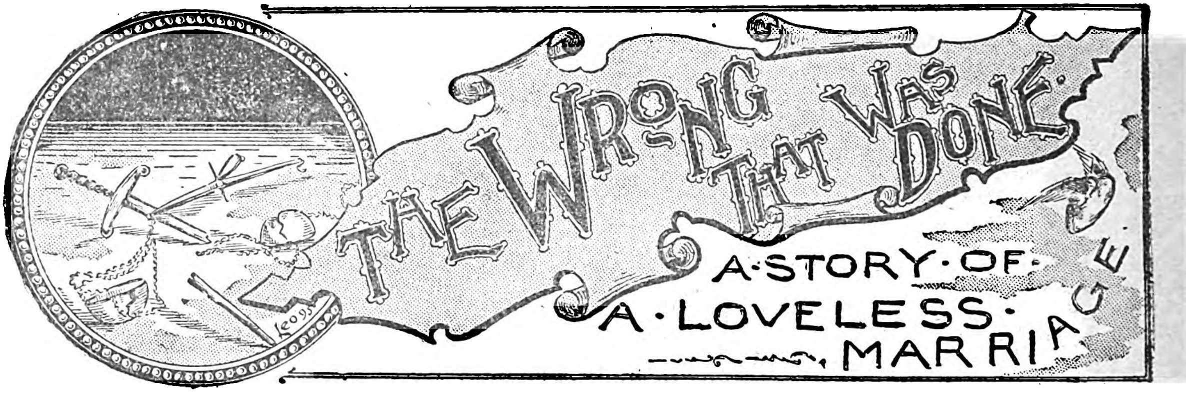
"But, Captain, what about that cockroach?" I said.

"For that lie I was punished, and shall bear the mark to my dying day."

The Captain continued: "When we reached Plymouth, I told an eminent physician my story. He said it was the Black Fly of the Ganges, very common in the environs of Calcutta. The natives call them 'Breeders of Pestilence.'

"Now, my friend, you know why I am afraid of flies."

E. Garnet.



THE WRONG THAT WAS DONE: A STORY OF A LOVELESS MARRIAGE

By E. C. WAGGENER.

CHAPTER I.

The plum trees were white with fragrant blossoms, the oaks hung out long tassels of palest emerald, and the maples were red with young leaves that only waited for warmer showers and brighter sunshine to change them to vivid green. Already the fields were beginning to look bright, and along the sunny slopes, and in the moist, sheltered valleys, the soft-springing verdure was starred with buttercups and daisies.

A gentle south wind, blowing across the hills and just stirring the budding leaves and opening flowers, brought with it that sense of freshness and vague delight which belongs only to the early springtime.

The young girl who came swiftly down the straggling little lane, that led from an old, grey, weather-beaten house on the hill to the railway-station below, must have felt something of the dewy sweetness and beauty of the morning, apart from some pleasing expectancy, for her hat was pushed back from her flushed face, allowing the cool breeze to wander through her hair, and her eyes shone with a bright, happy light.

Lovely eyes they were, too. Grey as to colour, and with a tender, wistful expression that lent a strange charm to her otherwise plain face. The coarse dark hair, growing low on the forehead, held no claim to beauty, except a tendency to cling in little curls about the temples, and the straight black eyebrows were too heavy to be pretty, even though they shaded such wonderful eyes. The mouth was large yet expressive, and there was a faint, habitual droop at the corners which caused the whole face to wear an odd, pathetic look, as if both laughter and tears were akin to it.

There was certainly no grace in the thin, angular form, with its stooping shoulders and narrow chest, yet one forgot to criticise the shyness and awkwardness of every movement in wondering what there was about the face to make it so strangely attractive.

She paused at a little gate that barred her way, and, shading her face with her hand, looked long and eagerly down the railway lines. Suddenly the faint, far-off whistle of a coming train was heard, and, hastily unfastening the gate, she hurried down the path towards the station.

When the gate swung to with a sharp click, a middle-aged man who was sitting in a large window watching with a grim smile the girl's movements, stood up from his seat and called in a thin, rasping voice:

"Helen! Helen!"

The girl stopped suddenly in her rapid walk, and, wheeling round, turned an impatient face towards the house.

"Well, what is it?" she asked curtly.

"I just want to say that I don't believe Kitty will come, so there's no need of breaking your neck to get to the station. You've been looking for her in vain for a week now, and as she didn't come on Monday it isn't very likely that she'll come at all. And if she *should* put in an appearance she can easily find her way to the house ——"

But the girl waited to hear no more. With a low, half-angry exclamation she turned away, and, quickening her steps, reached the station just as the train rounded the bend in the line. The station-master, a wizen-faced old man, came hurrying out of the dingy little office with the mail-bag in one hand and a formidable-looking bundle in the other.

"Lookin' fur somebody, air you?" he remarked, with a sharp glance at Helen's flushed, eager face.

"I'm expecting Kitty," she said. "She ought to have been here a week ago."

"So Miss Kitty's comin' back. Well, well, well! I should think she wouldn't fancy comin' after what happened five years ago," mumbled the old man, as he edged nearer the platform.

Either his voice was lost in the roar of the coming train, or else Helen was indifferent to his words, for she made no answer, but sat with her eyes fixed intently on a face that was pressed against one of the windows of a third-class carriage, but which disappeared as the engine came to a sudden standstill.

In a moment the door was flung open, and a slight, girlish figure sprang lightly out on the platform straight into Helen's arms.

"I was sure you would be here to meet me," said the new comer in a voice of singular sweetness.

"And I was afraid I would be disappointed, as I have been every day for a week," said Helen. "Oh, Kitty, I'm so glad, so glad!" and she took her sister's face between her two hands and covered it with kisses. "It seems too good to be true to have you with me after all these years," she added, gazing down with moist eyes, yet smiling the while for pure joy.

"Have you really missed me so much?" asked Kitty presently, as they climbed the steep hillside.

"Have I missed you? Why, there hasn't been a day that I haven't missed you and longed to see you," said Helen, giving the hand within her own a loving squeeze.

"And our stepfather—was *he* expecting me?" asked Kitty suddenly, and with a little gesture towards the house.

"I—I—think not," returned Helen, somewhat confusedly. "He remarked this morning that he didn't believe you'd come—that you were afraid ——"

"Indeed!" interrupted Kitty, with a contemptuous smile. "Does he think I fear *him?* What was there to prevent me from coming? This is my home as well as yours, although I come back to it as a stranger."

"That is what I told him," put in Helen eagerly. "I mean I told him you had a perfect right to come. And now that you are here don't let anything he may do or say drive you away again."

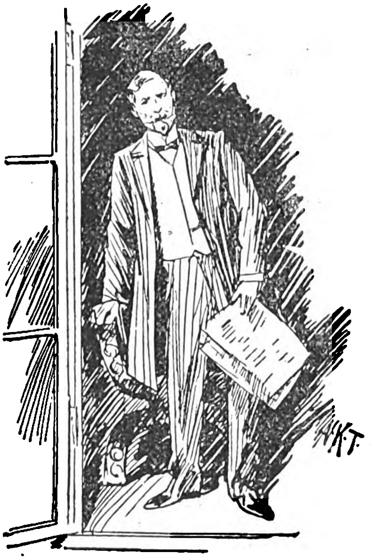
"Nothing can drive me away if I choose to stay," said

Kitty, with a proud uplifting of her small head. "Sometimes," and she set her white teeth firmly together for a second, "I wonder how you have endured him all these years; how you have borne with his crafty, wheedling ways, his lying tongue, and his detestable hypocrisy. I think it would be the happiest moment in my life if I could see him lying dead before me."

"Oh, Kitty, it's wicked to talk like that," cried Helen reproachfully. "I don't wish *that* of him, though I would be glad if he'd go away and leave us in peace."

"He will never do it," said Kitty passionately. "Just as long as he lives he'll stay here and make life wretched for us both. I would do right to take you away from him; but should you leave here you would be giving up the last hope of ever asserting your right to the place, and for your sake I'll stay with you and defy him to the bitter end. Don't think because I've stayed away all these years that I care nothing for the old home. Every tree and flower, every nook and corner of it is dear to me, yet it has never been the same to me since he came here and darkened our lives."

"Still there has been no change in it," said Helen thoughtfully.



Stood up from his seat.

"No, it is we who are changed," sighed Kitty, as they walked slowly up the familiar path.

Two cedars, straight and tall, stood like sentinels at the entrance of the gate; a honeysuckle that was beginning to take on fresh green leaves drooped over the wide porch, a lilac tree covered with great spikes of purple blossoms shaded the front windows, and the gravelled pathway leading up to the house was white with the fallen blooms of the cherry trees that grew in even rows on either side. Great oaks that had stood for half a century spread their budding branches over the mossy roof, and a quaint, old-fashioned garden stretched its cool vistas down to the edge of a shadowy pine forest.

"You are not going to quarrel with him, are you, Kitty?" asked Helen, with a quick glance at the bent figure in the porch.

"It rests with him," answered Kitty briefly.

"So you have come," and the figure slowly rose and extended a long, bony hand. "To say that I am surprised would be putting it rather mildly. You are none the less welcome, though, after your long absence," and a disagreeable smile distorted the man's face.

"Thanks," returned Kitty, in an icy tone, affecting not to see the offered hand. And without another word she followed Helen into the house.

"Now tell me, dear," she said, when she had laid aside her hat, and bestowed a passing glance at herself in the old-fashioned mirror that hung over the fireplace, "does the worthy Colonel really mean to be friendly with me. Or was his pleasant greeting only a mask to hide his hypocrisy? Five years ago we parted bitter enemies. To-day he meets me with a show of friendship that I don't in the least understand or like."

"Don't ask me what he means, Kitty, for in all these years I have never been able to understand him," said Helen with a troubled look. "I know he has seemed glad and relieved that we never heard from you. And often when I have begged him to try to learn your whereabouts he has ventured the opinion that you were either dead or wished to be considered dead, not only to your friends here in Looe but to me. But now that you are here, and he has met you in a friendly way, you'll be civil to him, won't you, Kitty? For my sake, if not for your own, don't quarrel with him again."

"I will refrain from a great many things for your sake," said Kitty, with an impulsive hug. "I will—" Then she stopped suddenly, and a queer expression crossed her face. "Why do you look at me so strangely, Helen?" she asked slowly.

"I was just thinking how much you have changed," said Helen with a little sigh.

"Have I grown old and ugly in five years?"

"No, you are the same beautiful Kitty you were when you went away. And yet there is something about your face that I don't quite understand."

"Perhaps it has grown hard," said Kitty with a light laugh. "When one has lost faith in everybody—"

"Surely you haven't lost faith in everybody?" and Helen lifted a pair of anxious, questioning eyes to her sister's face.

"In everybody but you, I think. But you, too, are changed. I left you a little girl, and come back to find you a serious-faced woman, burdened, no doubt with many household cares. Yet you are much prettier than you were when I kissed you good-bye five years ago."

Helen flushed hotly at the unexpected compliment, and fled to the window to hide her confusion.

"How I long to get into the woods again!" began Kitty, when she was interrupted by the sudden opening of the door.

"The Colonel wants to see the young lady in the parlour," said a drawling voice. "The young lady that's jest come, I mean," and the head that had appeared so unceremoniously vanished as suddenly as it came.

"A new servant, I presume, and, like her master, has yet to learn good manners," remarked Kitty drily. "How often does Colonel Beverly make a change in his servants, Helen?"

"Once a month," said Helen laughing. "He finds fault with them continually, and ends by dismissing them before the month is up and engaging new ones, who meet with the same fate."

"And I suppose the poorer he gets the greater number of servants he keeps," said Kitty with a little scornful curl of her lip. "When I think of the money he has squandered," she went on excitedly, "money that was rightfully yours and mine, I feel that I was very foolish not to consult a lawyer in the very beginning."

"But I wonder what he can have to say to me that he must needs see me alone?" said Kitty resentfully.

"I'm sure I haven't the least idea. But you must go to him, Kitty, or we'll see no peace for the rest of the day. And no matter how cross and disagreeable he is, don't quarrel with him, please."

"It all depends upon what he has to say to me. If he means to tell me that my presence in this house interferes with his comfort in any way I shall tell him plainly that I shall stay just as long as I choose, and that I have come back to protect you and stay with you until you grow tired of me and send me away. Don't be a little goose!" For Helen was clinging to her, tears in her soft eyes and a flush of excitement on her face. "I shan't make a scene if I can avoid it. And, whatever happens, I'll try to treat him civilly for your sake."

CHAPTER II.

"I really must thank you for your promptness in granting me this interview," said Colonel Beverly, as with a pompous wave of his hand, he motioned Kitty to a chair directly opposite his own. "I hardly expected you'd be willing to hold a conversation with me after—ahem!" and he coughed nervously behind his hand—"the—the—absence of any cordiality in your greeting a little while ago. The past——"

"I didn't come here to discuss the past," interrupted Kitty stiffly. "If you have anything important to say to me, Colonel Beverly——"

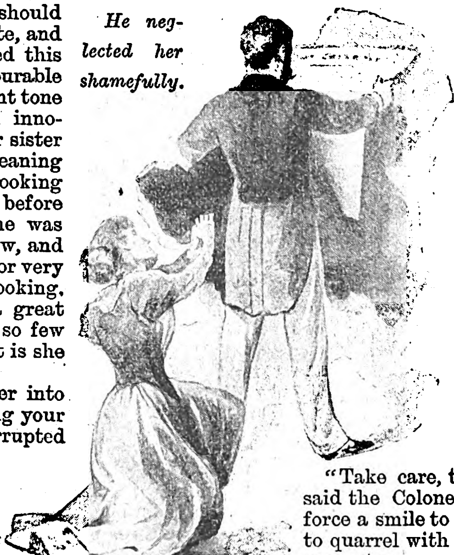
"Why not call me father?" put in the Colonel, with an insinuating smile and a crafty look in his deep-set eyes. "Helen never thinks of calling me anything else."

"Helen may call you anything she pleases. You have never been, nor will ever be, anything but Colonel Beverly to *me*."

"Very well; we won't quarrel about such a trifling matter. But, in coming back here after an absence of five years, during which we had no knowledge of your whereabouts, I should think you'd be willing to forget a great deal, so long as *I* show a disposition to be friendly and lenient."

"Spare me the infliction of another long sentence like that, and come to the point at once, if you please," said Kitty impatiently. "What do you want? And what have you to say to me that you summon me here before I have been in the house half an hour?"

She spoke in a quiet, even voice, controlling her temper, which had risen hot and fierce at his cool impertinence, and giving no sign of the disgust and repugnance which she felt for him.


He neglected her shamefully.

"It is very important that I should see you and speak to you in private, and at once, else I would have deferred this interview until some more favourable time," he said, dropping his insolent tone and assuming an air of injured innocence. "Of course, you find your sister much changed," he went on, leaning back comfortably in his chair and looking straight at the beautiful face before him. "When you went away she was a mere child. She is a woman now, and while she is neither very pretty nor very accomplished, she isn't at all bad-looking, and, I suppose, would receive a great deal of attention if there weren't so few marriageable men in Looe. As it is she has led a very secluded life——"

"Is it really necessary to enter into this long explanation before stating your object in sending for me?" interrupted Kitty.

"Patience, patience, my dear girl. I am coming to that presently," he said, with a smile that was meant to be bland. "I suppose"—and he rubbed his hands together and chuckled softly—"you have never thought of the probability of your sister marrying some day, eh?"

"It hasn't entered my mind, though there would be nothing strange or unnatural in her getting married, provided she found some one worthy of her and whom she loved. I suppose if she has any intention of getting married she'll tell me in due time."

"Doubtless she will."

"When I said there were very few marriageable men in Looe I didn't mean that Helen had never had an offer. She has met and is engaged to a man in every way worthy of her, and I give you fair warning that you are not to come between them. You have come home to remain, I presume, for an indefinite time, and, of course, will see and be thrown a great deal with the man your sister is to marry; so I wish you to distinctly understand that I won't have any interference on your part, nor shall you carry on any flirtation under her innocent eyes. She was too young to understand the whole of that wretched affair with Val; but *I* know you, and I repeat it, you shall do nothing to prevent this marriage. You ruined one man's life and drove him to the bad, and I want none of your old tricks here again."

"Indeed!" said Kitty in a low voice. She had risen to her feet and stood with one hand resting lightly on the mantel. Only the sudden trembling of her fingers, and the ashy pallor that had spread over her face, betrayed her terrible anger. "There never has been, there never can be, the slightest feeling of friendship between you and me," she went on; "but understand this much, I shall remain in this house, where I have a perfect right to be, just as long as I choose to stay.

"And you are never to mention Valentine Beverly's name to me again. You have some hidden purpose in wanting to be the first to inform me of Helen's engagement. I love her too well to oppose her in anything that concerns her happiness, and shall certainly say nothing to prevent her from marrying whom she chooses. But I shall not keep silent through fear of *you*. If the man is worthy of her, why are you afraid that I will interfere? Did she make her own selection, or did you make it for her? Remember, when she marries she will not be compelled to remain under the same roof with you."

"I have had that fact in my mind for several years."

"Why our mother should have exacted such a promise from her I could never understand."

The Colonel leant forward in his chair, and rested his sharp chin in his long, claw-like hands.

"I know this much," continued Kitty quickly, "that you spoilt her life and broke her heart with your cruel neglect. You married her for her money, and when you had squandered all you could get possession of, you neglected her shamefully, often refusing to provide even the necessaries of life. Do you think I have forgotten those dreadful days when Helen and I went about clothed like beggars? Do you think I have forgotten how mother looked? How she trembled at the sound of your voice, and even hid, at times, to escape your outbursts of temper? Do you think I don't remember the many times you came home intoxicated, bringing into this very room a crowd of villainous men who drank and smoked and made the night hideous with their quarrels and noisy mirth?"

"Take care, take care! you are going a little too far," said the Colonel, choking down his wrath and trying to force a smile to his lips. "As I said before, I have no wish to quarrel with you. Now that you are here, it suits my present purpose to be on friendly terms with you. To be frank with you, Helen's marriage will leave me in quiet possession of the place, unless you choose to make trouble."

"But it is *my* home, too; so if Helen marries I must go out into the world again and earn my living. Is that what you mean?"

"Can't you make your home with her, and leave me in peace?"

"I came back here to assert my rights—mine and Helen's," said Kitty firmly, "and shall make no such promise as you wish me to make. I did a very foolish thing when I went away. I shall stay here with Helen until she marries. And then—"

"Well?"

"Then *you* will have to go away."

The Colonel stroked his beard softly and laughed.

"Would you mind telling me where you spent the last five years?" he asked presently. "You see, it will be rather awkward not to explain to your friends where you have been and what you have been doing all this time.”

“I have no friends here in Looe to whom I think it necessary to explain anything,” answered Kitty haughtily.

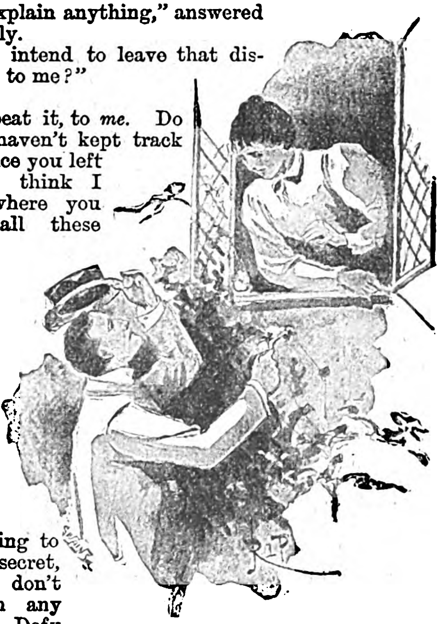
“Then you intend to leave that disagreeable task to me?”

“To *you*?”

“Yes, I repeat it, to *me*. Do you think I haven't kept track of you ever since you left us? Do you think I don't know where you have been all these years?”

“And does Helen know?”

“Sit down and don't look so frightened. I'm not such a bitter enemy as you think. Not a soul here in Looe save myself knows the truth, and I am quite willing to keep your secret, provided you don't interfere with any of my plans. Defy me, though, and try to thrust me out of the only home I have, and you'll see what will come of it. And now I think we understand each other perfectly.”



“Everything has changed since he commenced coming here.”

Kitty rose and moved slowly towards the door, her face pale as death, a strange look of misery in her eyes.

CHAPTER III.

“I believe I'll run down to Mallingford to-day,” remarked Colonel Beverly to his step-daughters, as they sat at breakfast one morning a week later. “Do you think you can manage to get along without me for one night?”

“Yes, if it is necessary for you to leave us; but it will be terribly lonely without you,” said Kitty, so sweetly that Helen, a little doubtful of the quiet irony of the speech, gave her a quick, puzzled look, but said nothing.

A heavy rain had been falling since early dawn, and showed no signs of abating, when the three rose from the table, the girls to go to their room, the Colonel to put on his waterproof overcoat preparatory to picking his way along the muddy road to the station.

“I wonder,” inquired Kitty, turning round and looking steadily at Helen, “if you have been keeping a secret from me ever since I came home.”

“A secret? I—I—really don't know what you mean.”

“You must be very simple and stupid then. I mean, do you like Gifford Vane very much?” said Kitty presently. “Is he more than a friend to you? Surely as your sister I have a right to know.”

“Yes, Kitty, I *do* care for him—very much. I meant to tell you all about it the very first day you came home, but you gave me no encouragement. You said you had lost faith in everybody, and I was afraid you'd laugh at me if I told you how much faith I have in Gifford. Father liked him from the first, and has always seemed proud of his attentions to me. There is no regular engagement, though. But we understand each other perfectly, and I think he is only waiting to get a good practice (you know he is a doctor) before he asks me to marry him.

“He often says that no man has a right to ask a woman to marry him until he is able to provide everything necessary to her comfort and happiness. I think he's sensible, don't you? And, oh, Kitty, you can't guess how everything has changed since he commenced coming here! Father is kinder to me than he ever was in his life—I mean when he isn't drinking—and, well, I have very little to complain of now. And to think how lonely my life used to be!”

“And mine,” commenced Kitty, then stopped abruptly, and walked hastily away from the mirror to the window.

“Tell me about it,” said Helen, following her up. “Why have you kept yourself hidden from us all these years? I know you quarrelled with father and went away to teach in a school; but I never understood why you refused to come back.”

“I had my choice—either to stay here and endure our stepfather's disagreeable temper, or go out into the world and earn my living. I chose the latter, because life in the same house with that man had grown unbearable. But I found the other life almost as hard, and there was only a little while during the past five years that I was happy. So you see mine, too, was a hard, bitter lot.”

“You should have married,” said Helen impulsively.

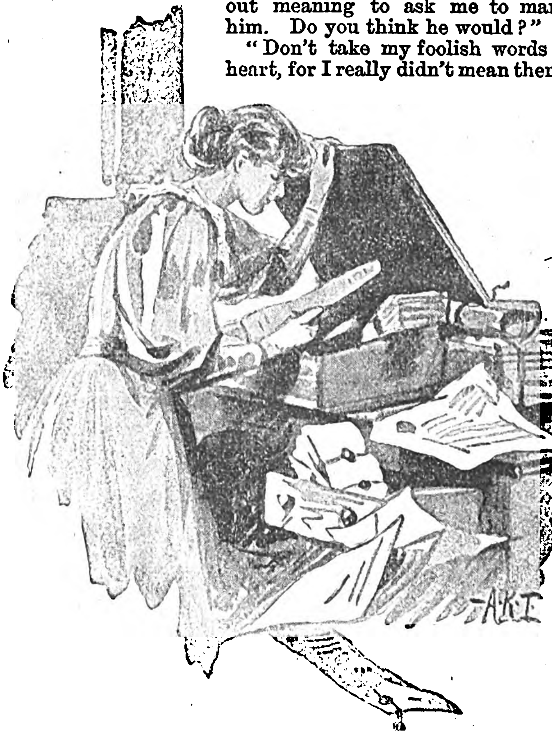
“Unfortunately there was no brave knight to step in and rescue me from my hard fate, as they do in the fairy books and sometimes in real life,” said Kitty, with a short, bitter laugh. “Tell me,” she added, looking earnestly into her sister's wistful eyes, “if you should find out that Gifford loved someone else would you care very much?”

“Would I care? Why, Kitty, I wouldn't want to live another minute!”

“Many a woman has said the same and thought the same, yet lived to laugh at her folly.”

“It's no folly with *me*,” said Helen passionately. “I *know* I would die if I were to find out that Gifford is only trifling with me. But he isn't. He wouldn't be coming here every day and showing me the attention he does without meaning to ask me to marry him. Do you think he would?”

“Don't take my foolish words to heart, for I really didn't mean them,”



Rummaging in an old-fashioned writing-desk.

said Kitty hastily. "I'm always making some thoughtless speech that I regret the next moment. I am sure Doctor Vane couldn't find a sweeter, better wife than my little sister—not if he hunted the world over."

"He hasn't seen *you*," said Helen, with a troubled look. "Not that I am jealous of you—don't think that, Kitty," she added quickly. "But you are so different from me. You have seen something of the world, and you know how to say those little things that please and flatter a man, while I am plain and awkward, and haven't education enough to make myself attractive to anybody. I hardly know how to express it, but I realise more and more every day that you and I are as different as it is possible for two persons to be."

"With this in your favour," said Kitty hastily, "that you haven't lost your childish faith and simplicity, and I have grown old before my time."

"Nonsense! At your age you are just beginning to live," said Helen, recovering her spirits and laughing gaily. "Just wait until you see John Eastman. I feel sure that you'll fall in love with each other at first sight."

"So you are going to turn matchmaker in your young and innocent days," said Kitty, with a yawn. "What a dismal morning," she added, going over to the window and looking out. "And how dark and lonesome the woods seem through this mist of rain."

Was it because of the dripping trees outside, the blurred landscape, and the dismal sighing of the wind that she felt so dispirited and desolate? Or was it because of bitter memories that she stood there with hot tears in her eyes and a fierce pain in her heart?

"It is always cold and dreary and lonesome in those woods," remarked Helen presently. "I have walked through them often on a sultry summer day and felt chilled to the very marrow before I came out."

Then a long silence fell between them, broken only by the wailing of the wind outside and the steady patter of the rain on the roof.

"I must show you the miniature I have of Gifford," said Helen suddenly. "I don't know why I haven't thought of it before." And rummaging in an old-fashioned writing-desk she took from one of the drawers a small velvet case, which she opened and handed to her sister.

"It's a good likeness, Kitty, though it was taken five years ago. One could never forget that face after seeing it once," she added proudly.

And, indeed, there was something strangely attractive about it. Not so much because of its perfect features as for the haunting look in the clear, smiling eyes. And as Kitty looked at those eyes and then at the fair, open brow that imparted such a boyish expression to the whole countenance, she would have given the half of her life to have been able to forget it.

How well she remembered the day when Gifford Vane had placed this same velvet case in her hand, with the laughing remark that it would serve to remind her of him should they ever be parted. How vividly every incident connected with that day came back to wring and torture her heart! The foolish quarrel, when she had given him back the miniature; the reconciliation that followed, her request for the picture, and his promise that she should have it back again that very evening. Then his unexpected summons to a distant town, his hasty departure, his forgetting to return the miniature—and then the long dreary silence that came afterwards. And now, after all these years, to find the gift she had prized above all others in the possession of another, and that other her sister. How would it all end, she wondered.

She closed the case and handed it to Helen with a smile.

"What do you think of him, Kitty?"

"He is very handsome, and I don't wonder that you love him," said Kitty, in a low, unsteady voice. Then she turned abruptly to the window again. Oh, to have this sick-longing for the touch of his hand and the sound of his voice, and to know that she had lost him for ever. And to add to her misery was the consciousness that he had long ago dismissed her from his mind and heart.

No wonder Helen had stared at her, a moment ago, in vague surprise; for, in spite of her effort at self-control, she felt that she had betrayed herself, and that her face, which had the unhappy trick of showing traces of tears for hours afterwards, would still further betray her if she stirred from her hiding-place there by the window.

(To be continued.)

A ✤ TEN-POUND ✤ PRIZE.

On the opposite page is a puzzle picture composed of 99 squares. If these squares be rearranged in a certain order they will form a real picture.

We offer a prize of £10 to the first person who sends the correct solution. In order to give readers in all parts of the United Kingdom as equal a chance as possible, the whole of the solutions received at 17, Henrietta Street in any one day will be considered together. In the very unlikely chance of two or more correct solutions being included in one day's post, the prize will be given to the sender of the *neatest* one.

If no correct solution be received on or before Tuesday, January 7th, 1896, the Ten-Pound Prize will be given to the sender of the solution then to hand which is most nearly correct.

Pictures should be packed flat or folded, not rolled, and the outside wrapper must be marked "December."

N.B.—To make the puzzle more difficult some of the squares have been turned upside down.

rushed in crying: "The king! Here comes the king!"

Lilith had only time to hide Hozaël in a large basket, and cover him with a pile of silks and bright wools, before King Herod entered with a slow, heavy tread, the chains and plates of gold, with which he was covered, shaking with each movement. His back was bent, and his blood-shot eyes glared in his terrible face; his chin shook so with the palsy that his bristly beard seemed to shudder. He said to Lilith: "Whence comest thou?"

She replied: "From Jericho." And she raised towards the king her eyes, as calm as the water of a cistern.

"Oh! how she resembles her!" murmured Herod.

At this moment, a little cry came from the basket.

"Will you keep quiet?" said Lilith to the cat, Astaroth, who slept on the rug. Then she said to the king: "My father, you seem troubled: would you like me to sing to you?"

And taking her zither, she sang him a song about roses.

And the king murmured: "Oh, that voice!"

Then he fled, as if struck with fear, because Lilith's voice and eyes recalled to him the voice and eyes of Queen Miriam.

* * * * *

Lilith went into the garden and found old Zabulon weeping.

"Why dost thou weep, old Zabulon?"

"You know the cause, Princess Lilith. I weep because the king wishes to kill the little child who is the Messiah."

"But," said Lilith, "if he is really the Messiah, men cannot have the power to kill him."

"God wishes us to help him," replied Zabulon. "Princess, you, who are so good and so compassionate, should warn the father and mother of the child."

"But where shall I find them?"

"Question the people of Bethlehem."

"But ought I to save one who will chase my father from this palace, one by whom I may some day become a poor prisoner, or a beggar in the streets?"

"That day is far removed," said Zabulon, "and the Messiah is now only a tiny babe, more helpless even than little Hozaël."

"But art thou sure that he is the Messiah?" demanded Lilith.

"Yes," said Zabulon, "because he was born in Bethlehem at the time appointed by the prophets, and the wise men have seen his star."

"He must be very beautiful, although he is so small; dost thou not think so, Zabulon?"

"It is written that he shall be the most beautiful among the children of men."

"I shall go to see him," said Lilith.

* * * * * *

When night came, Lilith enveloped herself in long black veils; and the bracelets and circles of gold upon her arms and ankles, the collars about her neck, and the precious stones with which she was covered, shone through her veils as softly as the stars in the sky. And thus Lilith resembled the night, whose name she bore; for in Hebrew "Lilith" signifies "the night"!

Lilith found Zebonda and her husband, Méthouel, in prayer. Both seemed filled with great joy! Lilith bethought her of a ruse.

"Hozaël is very well," said she, "and I shall bring him back to you to-morrow. But since you know where to find the Messiah, lead me to him. I am come to adore him."

Méthouel was a simple man, little disposed to think ill of others, so he replied: "I will show you the way, Princess Lilith."

* * * * *

When they reached the spot where the infant lay, Lilith was greatly astonished, for she expected to see something extraordinary and magnificent, without knowing exactly what, and she only saw a hut built against a rock, and in this hut an ass, an ox, a man who appeared to be a workman, a woman of the people, beautiful, yes, but pale and delicate, and poorly clad. And in the manger, lying upon the straw, was a little child, whom at first glance she thought like any other child. But when she drew nearer, she saw its eyes; and in those eyes a look not that of a babe; an infinite sweetness, more than human, and she became aware that the stable was only lighted by the light which emanated from him.

She said to the young mother: "What is your name?"

"Miryem."

"And your little boy?"

"Jesus."

"Will you let me kiss your little boy?"

Lilith stooped and kissed the child upon the forehead, and Miryem was a little vexed that she did not kneel.

"So," said Lilith, "this little child is the Messiah?"

"You have said it, madam."

"And he will be King of the Jews?"

"It is for that God has sent him."

"But then he will make war and kill many men, and he will dethrone King Herod or his successor?"

"No," said Miryem, "for his kingdom is not of this world. He will have neither guards nor soldiers; he will have neither palaces nor treasures; he will not inflict taxes upon the people, and he will live like the poorest fisherman on the Lake of Gennesareth. He will be the servant of the poor and humble. He will heal the sick and comfort the afflicted. He will teach truth and justice. It is over hearts, not bodies, that he will reign. He will suffer, to teach us the price of suffering. He will be the King of Love, for he will love all men. And he will teach those who are tormented with a longing which this world cannot satisfy, where their poor hearts can find peace and joy. And no doubt he will have a throne."

"Ah, now you see!" said Lilith, still resisting.

"But," resumed Miryem, "the throne will be a cross. He will die upon a cross, to expiate the sins of men, so that God, his Father, may have pity upon them."

Lilith listened in astonishment. Slowly she turned her head towards the manger. The babe was gazing at her; and, vanquished by the caress of those deep eyes, she murmured: "No one ever told me those things before," and falling upon her knees, she adored him.

"I know," said Lilith, as she rose, "that King Herod will search for the child to kill him. Take the ass, and fly. I will pay its master!"

* * * * *

Every one knows that the Princess Lilith was one of the holy women who followed Jesus on the day of His sacrifice, and that little Hozaël was one of the first disciples of Christ, the Saviour. Ethel Dicey.

The Russian Spy

BY
JOHN K. LEYS,
AUTHOR OF
"The Tenth of June,"
"In the Toils,"
etc.

"So you are going back to England, Mr. Thompson?" said my host, Michael Ostranovitch. "Do you go by Königsberg?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then perhaps you would not mind looking after a young lady, a sister of my friend Varinski"—he introduced a tall, long-haired man with a wave of his hand—"M. Varinski, Mr. Thompson. She is unfortunately obliged to go to England without an escort. In this weather, too!"

Of course I bowed, and said that I would be delighted if I could be of any service, and would feel honoured if Mademoiselle were placed in my charge.

So it came about, and on the journey Mademoiselle Lovna Varinski told me she was going to England to be a governess in a family of distinction.

"You surprise me!" I exclaimed. "I understood that ever since Mademoiselle Ixe came to our country, the British matron has fought shy of Russian governesses."

"Mademoiselle Ixe?" she said, with a questioning look in her pretty brown eyes.

I told her the story.

The girl's face flushed as she listened; her lips parted; her breath came faster; I could see that she had clasped her hands tightly together under her wraps. As I finished, her eyes flashed fire.

Her expression, joined to one or two details that had seemed to me a little odd, set me wondering whether my companion was a member of the proscribed society.

"One cannot help sympathising with those Nihilists," I said, with some idea of drawing her out.

She looked at me with an alarmed expression in her eyes.

"You forget that we are in Russia," she said quietly, and changed the subject.

I found her an intelligent girl, and altogether a charming companion. We talked of many things, but I noticed that as often as the conversation verged on political topics she adroitly turned it into a safer channel.

When dinner was served in the dining-car I proposed that we should sit down together, but this my companion declined. She had sandwiches and a flask of claret in her travelling-bag, she said. I found it impossible to shake her resolution, and, a little piqued at her obstinacy, I went myself to the dining-car.

Opposite to me, as it happened, was an acquaintance I had noticed on the platform at St. Petersburg—Nicolas Petrovitch. His face wore a look of ill-concealed anxiety. His short, stubbly grey hair, rising straight up from his forehead, stiff as an oak fence, contrasted queerly with his rosy cheeks and smooth chin.

"Mr. Thompson," he said, bowing politely to me, "may I presume to congratulate you?"

"On what?" I asked bluntly, giving him my hand.

"On your marriage," he returned, putting a fat, dimpled paw into mine.

"My marriage!" I exclaimed.

"I beg ten thousand pardons!" cried he. "I jumped to the conclusion that the lady you were travelling with must be your wife."

"You jumped a little too far, then," said I. "No; the lady you spoke of is going to England. My friend Ostranovitch asked me——"

Here the waiter, placing a hot dish on the table, must have let fall a drop of scalding gravy on M. Petrovitch's hand, for he started violently, and then looked up at the man with a scowl on his face.

"I really beg your pardon," said my neighbour, rubbing his hand vigorously with his napkin. "You were saying that your friend——"

"Put the young lady under my charge as far as London. She is going to be a governess in an English family."

"Indeed! She looks very young to have such a post. But Mademoiselle Ostranovitch——"

"Her name is not Ostranovitch," I interrupted. "She is Mademoiselle Varinski."

"Well, whatever her name is, I suppose you prefer her society to that of a stupid old fellow like myself. It is of no use to ask you to smoke a cigar after dinner."

"I shall be happy to do so," I returned.

"It will be a change to you after talking to a charming young lady for six hours. I hope she proved to be a good conversationalist."

"She is most intelligent, most charming," said I; "and she knows how to hold her tongue, too. On Russian politics, for example, she would not utter a word."

"Really!"

Petrovitch passed me the decanter, and I filled my glass.

"Yes, I have had a pleasant journey, thanks to Mademoiselle Varinski," I said, in answer to a remark of my companion's. "Poor thing! Her face at times wore a sad expression. I fancy she has seen trouble. Once, when I spoke of a Nihilist heroine her eyes seemed to burn. Perhaps her father, or brothers——"

I paused, conscious that I was going too far; and changed the subject.

Dinner was just over when the train stopped. It was the last stopping place before we reached the frontier station. I got out to buy a newspaper, and returned as the train was starting. To my surprise Petrovitch was seated opposite to Mademoiselle Varinski, and was talking to her earnestly.

"Please yourself, madam," he said to her as I entered the carriage. "If you do not immediately hand over the papers I know you have in your possession, I will denounce you to the authorities here, and they will send you back to St. Petersburg."

Suddenly he made a dive at her muff, seized it, fingered it all over, tore out the lining, and removed some papers which had been hidden there.

The train began to move.

"Stop!" I cried, placing my hand on his arm. My object was to delay till we were clear of the station, and then take the papers from him by force.

He threw off my grasp, and the next moment I was looking into the muzzle of a revolver.

"Stand back!" he shouted. "Fool! I belong to the St. Petersburg police."

"Ah!" cried I, affecting the utmost surprise; "that is a different matter altogether."

One sad reproachful look from the brown eyes followed me. I took no notice of it.

The train moved on; and the spy sat down to examine the papers he had taken from the Nihilist messenger. Although I had thought it best to preserve an air of indifference, I was profoundly moved by what had happened; my self-reproach was keen. To think that my unguarded tongue had brought this poor girl into trouble! Besides, she had been placed under my care. A nice guardian I had proved!

"This is more serious than I had supposed," observed Petrovitch. "You'll have to go back to St. Petersburg after all," he said to the girl with a grin. My blood fairly boiled.

What could I do to help her? What—what could I do?

Suddenly an idea darted into my brain. I rejected it as totally impracticable. I was not used to the work. I should bungle it, and only get myself into trouble. My nerve would not bear me out. Then I thought of that white-faced creature opposite me the inmate of a Russian prison, the prey of——

I rose, and turning round opened my travelling bag, which was in the rack overhead, and took from it a flask of brandy, and a small phial containing chloral. Being a victim of the demon Neuralgia I never travel without it. Concealing the phial in my hand I opened the flask, poured out some brandy, and drank it; and then (disregarding an eloquent look from Petrovitch) wrapped myself in my Inverness cape, and throwing myself down at full length pretended to go to sleep.

If I had been wearing a common overcoat I could never have managed it. But under the friendly shelter of the cape, which left my arms free, I found it easy to unscrew the flask-stopper with one hand, while I uncorked the phial with the other. To pour the contents of the phial into the flask was more difficult, but with a little patience the thing was done.

Then I roused myself up and took another pull at the brandy, affecting to drink more than I did. This time I met Petrovitch's look, and smiled, and handed him the flask. To my unspeakable disappointment, instead of emptying it, he took only about half of what it contained.

"Finish it!" I cried. "I can get more when we arrive at the frontier."

But he shook his head, and I feared to press him to take more.

I lay back in my seat. He did the same. The train rattled on. He closed his eyes.

I waited for a quarter of an hour, and then touched the spy's leg as if accidentally. He did not move. I did the same thing again, pushing briskly against him. He never stirred.

The next instant I was on my feet, and had my hand in the pocket into which I had seen him thrust the revolver. I unloaded it, set my heel on the trigger and broke part of the mechanism, then opened the window and threw it out.

"Quick!" I cried to Lovna. "We have only ten minutes. They will wake him at the frontier."

"Then I am trapped—and you, too!"

The look with which these last words were said would almost have recompensed me if it had been so!

"Not yet!" I whispered. "Get out your needle and thread, if you have such things in your bag."

By this time I had possessed myself of the spy's pocket-boot. All papers proving his connection with the police I tore into fragments, and sent after the revolver. Those which he had taken from Mademoiselle Varinski, with the exception of two, I placed inside the newspaper I had bought at our last stopping-place. It had never been read, and still wore the innocent appearance of having come fresh from the bookstall. The two documents I kept back were revolutionary tracts, such as are smuggled into Russia in thousands. One of them I placed inside the lining of the spy's hat. The other Lovna sewed up in the skirt of his overcoat, taking care not to do the work too neatly.

Hardly had this been done when the train ran into the frontier station. Petrovitch did not awake. We alighted, and I at once took Lovna into another carriage.

Then I waited as long as I dared, for every moment that the spy slept was more precious than gold. When I saw that he would be roused in two or three minutes I sought out the superintendent of police, and told him that I thought it my duty to inform him that I had travelled from St. Petersburg in company with a very queer individual. This man and I had had some talk, I said; and when he saw that my suspicions were aroused he declared that he belonged to the Russian secret police.

A smile passed over the official's visage as I said these words. It was next to impossible, from his point of view, that an agent of the police should proclaim his true vocation to a stranger. Petrovitch's story was already discredited.

"He was asleep when I left him," said I; "I will take you to his carriage."

"Is it a common trick of criminals to pretend to belong to the secret police?" I asked, as we walked on.

"Not very. But I have heard of it. Very often they have been employed as spies for a time, so that the deception comes more easily to them."

"This is the carriage," I exclaimed, as the bell rung opportunely. "I must go, or I shall miss my train. The man is middle-aged, rosy face, smooth-shaven, iron-grey hair—you can't mistake him!"

"Stay!" cried the superintendent, holding my arm as I was rushing away. "Where are you going?"

"To Königsberg. If I am wanted telegraph to me at the Imperial Hotel. Name—Arnaud Polerache."

As our train moved out of the station I saw Petrovitch, hatless, wild, gesticulating, borne along the platform, the centre of a group of policemen. One of them carried the spy's hat in one hand and the coat in the other.

I turned to congratulate my comrade.

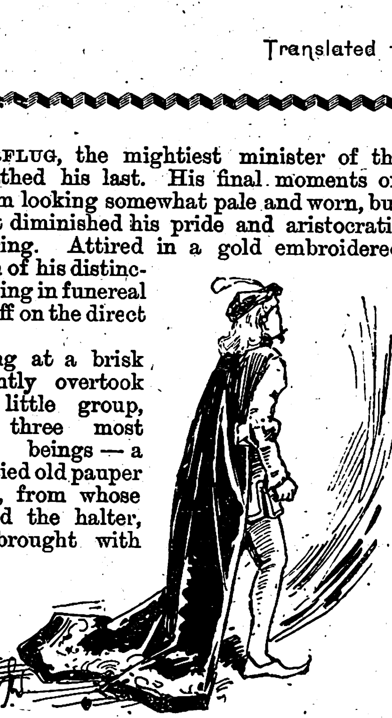
She had fainted.

At Königsberg, where, for safety's sake, we separated, I handed her her papers, which I had carried with me folded up in the fresh newspaper; and she gave me in return a souvenir, which I shall keep as long as I live.

The Humming Top.

Translated from the German.

Count Geierflug, the mightiest minister of the realm, had breathed his last. His final moments on earth had left him looking somewhat pale and worn, but had in no respect diminished his pride and aristocratic elegance of bearing. Attired in a gold embroidered coat, such as men of his distinction wear when lying in funereal state, he started off on the direct road to Heaven.



Marching along at a brisk pace, he presently overtook and passed a little group, consisting of three most wretched-looking beings — a white-haired, palsied old pauper woman, a youth, from whose neck still dangled the halter, which he had brought with him from the closing scene of his life drama, and a little hump-backed consumptive boy, five or six years old, who, from time to time, glanced lovingly at a toy clasped close in his hand.

Count Geierflug arrived at the gates of Heaven, and politely addressed St. Peter.

"Pardon me," he began, "I would merely beg to inquire——"

But the former apostle and present keeper of the Celestial Gates interrupted him sternly:

"It's not your turn. The three behind there, whom you passed on the road, come first."

"Before me! I am Count Geierflug, the prime minister. I have the title of excellency, am knight of innumerable orders, member of various learned societies—and——"

"Up here we recognise neither knight nor scholar."

"Yet your Reverence was a kind of knight yourself, and wielded a dashing blade in the affair of Malchus."

Peter silently regarded the smiling speaker.

"And your Reverence was also a quasi—scholar—or author—or——"

"On earth I was only a poor fisherman."

"And yet," continued the Count, with a profound bow, "your Reverence's Epistles are even more celebrated than the world-renowned letter of Mme. de Sevigne."

Again St. Peter surveyed the flatterer in utter silence, but with so penetrating a gaze that the false courtier's eyes drooped beneath it.

In the meantime the three pilgrims had arrived.

No sooner did St. Peter see the boy's innocent face and crippled body than he said kindly:

"Run in, little one. This is the right place for you."

The apostle then turned to a thick book, upon which, in golden letters, was marked "Ledger."

"What is your name?" he asked the old woman.

"Brigitte Stegmaierin, if you please, holy Saint Peter," she replied, with a courtesy.

"Precisely—Brigitte Stegmaierin," replied St. Peter, poring over his ledger. Then in a grumbling tone he continued: "Debit—Has a bitter, bad tongue of her own. Credit—She is wretchedly poor."

"Poor!" cried the old crone, weeping and flinging up her arms. "God is my witness, that is true; and the holy Saint Peter himself knows that poverty is a gnawing pain."

"Well, well," said the apostle gently, "go in, granny, go in. In there, there is no more poverty or pain."

The young man with a halter round his neck now stepped forward.

"Your name," demanded St. Peter.

"Veit Kratzern."

"Stole a gold bracelet," read the apostle, with a frown.

"Item: A purse full of money.

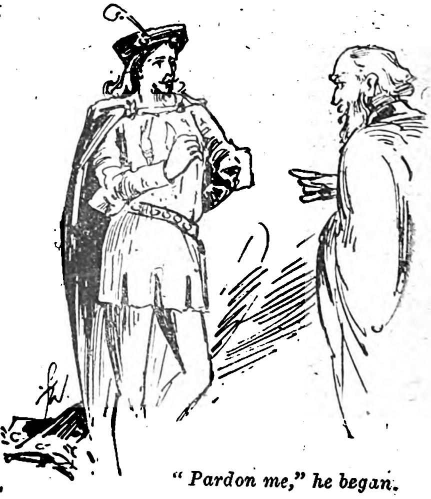
"Item: The contents of the contribution box of St. James's Church."

St. Peter scowled fiercely at the youth, who shook like a leaf in the blast.

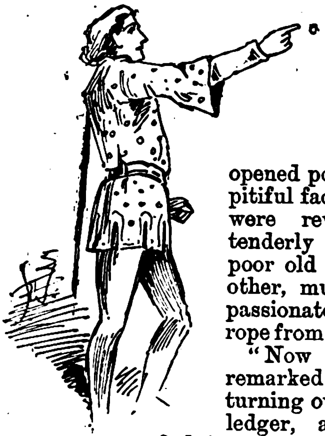
"Credited: He did it all without the slightest doubt at the instigation and intreaty of his sweetheart. H'm! Did you love the woman so very much?"

"Ah!" faltered the boy. "I could never tell you how much I——"

"Enough!" broke in St. Peter. "Don't talk to me about it. Be off, will you, out of my sight."



"Pardon me," he began.

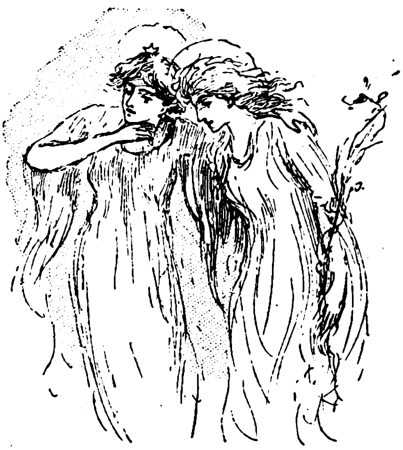


"What! In there?" and the thief pointed towards the Gates.

"Well, yes. Only make haste or I may repent my weakness."

Through the briefly opened portals the fair forms and pitiful faces of two shining angels were revealed. One of them tenderly wiped the tears from poor old Brigitte's eyes, while the other, murmuring mild and compassionate words, removed the rope from Veit Kratzern's neck.

"Now we are ready for you," remarked St. Peter to the Count, turning over leaf after leaf of the ledger, and suddenly exclaiming in a horrified tone:



"That looks promising, indeed Column after column of debit items, while nothing stands to your credit—absolutely nothing."

The Count began pompously:

"I have advanced the commerce, manufactures and agriculture of my native land. I have protected and promoted arts and sciences. I have built churches and schools and orphan asylums and hospitals and poor houses and——"

"Peace!" cried St. Peter angrily. "All that is charged fast enough not to your credit, but against you, because it was done from ambition and selfishness, and ostentation and hypocrisy."

"My life's best work," continued the Count, still more proudly; "how I made my fatherland great and glorious beyond all lands on earth, I do not need to mention, for I presume my fame has long ago ascended here."

"Your fame," retorted St. Peter, with increasing indignation, "has not reached us, but the groans of dying youths have risen to us from your battlefields, and from desolate homes the despair of mothers and brides; and, I tell you, wretch, if you have nothing better than this to urge, you are a lost man."

The Count grew still paler, and had not a word to say for himself.

At this moment the little boy, lingering on the threshold of Heaven, called out:

"Mr. Peter! Mr. Peter!"

"Are you still there, my little man?" returned the apostle. "Why do you not enter?"

Instead of replying to this question, the little fellow said:

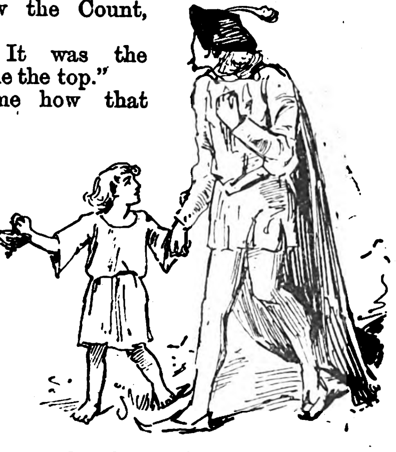
"Mr. Peter, do you see this humming-top?"

St. Peter replied indulgently:

"Pray, how came it there?"

"My mother laid it in my grave with me," said the child seriously. He then picked up his top, re-wound it, and extending the top temptingly towards the apostle, said:

"Mr. Peter, if you will let the Count go in there with me, I will let you spin my top."



"Do you know the Count, child?"

"Of course. It was the Count who gave me the top."

"Ah! Tell me how that happened, dear boy."

"Once I was sitting at the door, eating my bread, and when I had finished I began to cry. Just then the Count came driving along in a beautiful blue and gold coach with four grey horses. And the carriage stopped, and the Count looked at me and said:

"'Are you hungry, little boy?'

"'No,' said I. 'I have just had my bread.'

"And the Count said: 'Why are you crying?'

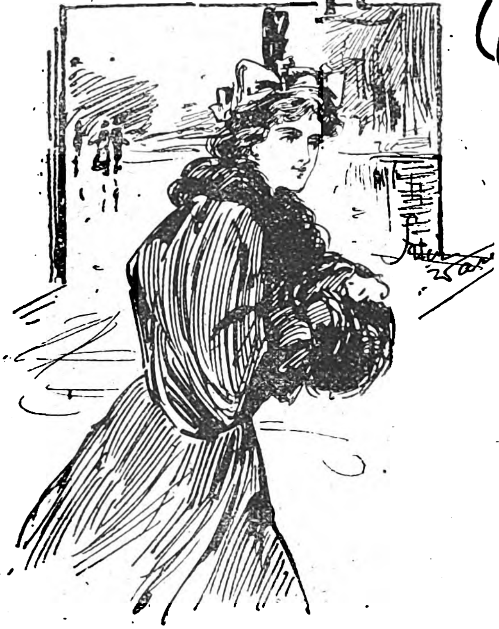
"And then I said: 'I am so lonely. Father and mother go off to work early in the morning, and don't come home till late at night, and the children won't play with me because I am so slow.' Then the Count said that he would bring me something to play with. And in a little time he came back with the top, and we made it spin, the Count and I together; after that I never cried any more."

St. Peter made no reply, but buried his head in the ledger, muttering:

"I know he's rather old fogeyish in his accounts, our old bookkeeper, Gabriel—still, we have always been able to rely upon him. Ah, I was sure of it," he exclaimed joyfully; "here it is, on the very last credit page: 'Gave a day labourer's crippled child a top—commonly called a humming-top—and with great kindness and gentleness showed the boy how to spin it.'"

With almost youthful eagerness St. Peter seized his red pencil and drew a broad line through the whole long list of sins and offences, and the next moment the Count, clasping the child's hand, entered the Kingdom.

The Taming of an Amazon



So far, during the eighteen years of her somewhat lively existence, no one had quite succeeded in making Miss Dolly Durwood out. The almost childlike slimness of her figure, and the exquisitely innocent expression of her sweet little oval face, were strangely at variance with the daring sentiments she gave utterance to, and the acts by which she was perpetually demonstrating her defiance of the conventionalities. Left parentless at the tender age of fifteen, she had come three years later into the possession in her own right of a rather handsome fortune, as well as of the roomy old family mansion at Tarrytown, where, with two ancient and wholly dependent maiden aunts for company, she ruled things like any little countess, living exactly the life that suited her, and sometimes shocking the neighbours, I fear, by the wildness of what the two ancient aunts aforesaid were accustomed to speak of, awe-strickenly, as her "goings-on."

As a figure in the humdrum daily life of the rather aristocratic little suburb, Miss Durwood was entirely unique. To the majority of the inhabitants she was known by the rather irreverent *sobriquet* of "Dolly the Dare-devil," and, truth to say, she earned it. She could ride like a circus-woman, and had a way of dashing at breakneck speed through the quiet streets at all hours of the day and night, occasionally adding interest of the performance by singing at the top of her voice. It was her boast that she could drink more champagne than any of her male acquaintances without going under the table. She could swim or row. She could shoot and fence, and box like a professor.

It is scarcely needful to say that this most extraordinary young woman proved a source of sad dismay, at times, to the two estimable aunts. She was quite hopeless, however, for when one of these good old ladies attempted a reproof or a remonstrance on account of some exceptionally outrageous performance, the niece would say simply: "Aunt Tabitha,"—or Aunt Mona, as the case might be—"I'm my own mistress—please remember that." And then in the next five minutes she would perpetrate some ridiculous prank, or maybe fall to hugging the old lady like a young bear, and kissing the wrinkled face into smiles again.

For men, as lovers, Miss Dorothy Durwood had no use whatever. When a man proposed to her, which he always did on two weeks' acquaintance, if he did at all, she simply put out her delicate little red tongue at him and laughed. If he "cut up rough," as she called it, she simply dropped him for good and all; if he accepted the situation sensibly, they remained good friends—a very charming arrangement.

But there had been just one occasion—the episode was now eighteen months old—when Miss Dorothy Durwood's heart had beaten faster beneath her pretty white bodice, and the colour had left the smooth cheeks, under the ordeal of contact with a congenial specimen of masculinity. His name was Ernest Dacre, and he was an artist by profession, with a pretty amateur knack of singing tender love ballads in a very acceptable baritone. Dacre first piqued the Tarrytown beauty into friendly relations with him by his indifference.

Then, just as she was beginning to flatter herself that this white-browed young artist with the smooth cheeks and boyish yellow hair was beginning to unbend a little, she had shocked him and everyone else by some madcap act. He had left the next morning without saying good-bye, and the memory of his face, with the queer look, half of sorrow, half of disdain upon it, brought a sting of resentment even yet.

To-night, however, she was radiant as she stood in her sumptuously furnished room. She smiled at herself, and her big black eyes gleamed as her arms were raised above her head to coax the waves of rebellious dusky hair into becoming coils. For they were to meet again. The fastidious Mr. Dacre, the only living man that had dared to possess the power to make her feel ashamed of herself, was making one of a skating party, and she had vowed to herself—well, if Mr. Ernest Dacre really did care anything about her, the young woman's resolutions boded ill for his peace of mind.

The river was frozen half the way over, and at the point where they took to the ice, at a boat-house they had reached by a viaduct reaching from the Durwood grounds, the surface was as smooth as a sheet of polished glass. To one, Travers, fell the joyous task of adjusting the steel blades to Miss Durwood's dainty boots. Then the two went gliding off together, leaving Dacre to wrestle with his skates, which were of the now obsolete "Acme" pattern and required careful adjusting. He had finished his task and was standing up preparatory to a start, when he saw Dorothy coming whirling towards him alone, as gracefully as a swallow, with great, long, outside-edge sweeps, and he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

The girl's cheeks were as red as peonies. She was glowing with the exercise. "Don't you intend to skate, Mr. Dacre?" she asked.

Dacre did not answer her question. "Miss Durwood," he said anxiously, "that ice is not safe."

"And why not, pray?"

"I saw it bend as you came over it."

The red lips curled scornfully. "Coward," she sneered. "You're afraid, and I hate you. Stay here in security, Mr. Misanthrope, and watch me enjoy myself."

Away she flew across the river towards the open water. Dacre was about to follow when Travers dashed up and came to a stop by grinding his heel into the ice. "I say, old man!" he ejaculated, holding up a wet foot, "this ice is treacherous; I just stuck a hoof through and——"

He stopped. Dacre's face had turned ghastly white, and he had started across the river as though a thousand furies were after him. Before Travers could move the artist had turned and yelled at him: "Don't follow me, for Heaven's sake. Get a rope!"

No man of any race ever skated as Dacre did that day. Every atom of the force of a long athletic training went into each stroke. With body bent and hands clenched he flew on.

* * * * *

Miss Durwood had not skated into the open water, as he had feared. She had simply encountered a stretch of ice, barely an inch thick, and gone through. She was now clinging feebly to the broken edge, with her head just above the surface, for the swift tide below was making persistent efforts to drag her down.

Now, Dacre had not meant to skate into the water by any means, but to fall upon the ice and pull the lady out. His momentum, however, was so great that he could not pull up, and into the hole he went, plump; and with such force, moreover, that his head went against the sharp edge of ice on its further side, gashing it cruelly. Half stunned, he turned, and, clasping the girl's waist with his left arm and gripping the ice with his right, felt an instantaneous improvement of spirits from the contact. "The coward whom you hate," he managed to gasp, "has come to keep you company."

The look of dumb reproach he received from the black eyes set him to work.

With a mighty effort he raised the girl, and forced one of her knees upon the ice. It promptly gave way.

He twined the fingers of his left hand in her hair and raised his own knee to the ice. It smashed again, and there they floundered, with fingers cut and bleeding. It began to look hopeless.

Then it was that the active brain of the artist conceived a great idea. Before him lay some five feet of thin ice; beyond that it was firm and secure. He whispered to the girl: "Can you hold on for a minute longer by yourself?"

She nodded feebly.

Supporting himself by extending his left arm over the ice, the young man pushed his right hand beneath the water till it met his upturned foot. He unclasped his skate, and thanked Providence at that instant for those simple, old-fashioned clamps. Then, with this weapon, he proceeded to smash the ice in front of him, giving himself and his companion a mighty lurch forward with every blow. They were nearly up to the firm ice when he felt his senses giving way, and in a sort of dream fastened about Dorothy's waist the slip-knot of a rope that, it seemed to him, had been let down from Heaven. Then he lost consciousness.

Travers had been in time.

* * * * *

They took the drenched and bedraggled pair to the house. The crowd of yokels that followed the grim procession to the gates obligingly dispersed thereat and departed to the inn to discuss this latest freak of the young lady on the hill.

Dorothy was laid in one room, with the antiquated aunts weeping distractedly over her, and Dacre in another. The doctor, after prescribing for the girl, turned his attention to the still unconscious young man, whose case seemed much more serious. The cut on his forehead was an ugly one, and the three other men looked grave as the doctor bent over him to stitch it up.

Just as the stitching was finished, and Dacre had delighted them all by heaving the first deep sigh of approaching consciousness, there was a commotion outside, and in another instant Dorothy, pale-cheeked and wild-eyed, with about half of her drenched clothes on, and followed closely by the two tearful and expostulating aunts, stood in the doorway.

"Don't dare to stop me," she cried passionately, "this is my house, and I'll do as I like in it. I *will* go to him. He saved me, and I called him a coward, and said I hated him." Dacre turned his head feebly, seeing which, the impetuous and wholly improper young woman sprang forward and flung herself on the bed beside him like a whirlwind. "Dear, *dear*, DEAR!" she sobbed, seizing his head fiercely in her two hands, to the infinite horror of the doctor and the two aunts, "you'll forgive me—yes, you will. I said I hated you. I didn't; I *loved* you—yes, I did, but I didn't know it. And I'll be good, and sweet, and quiet, just like your sister, if you'll only"—a sob—"forgive."

"Dorothy, my darling," said one of the aunts, with a quiver in her voice and a handkerchief at her kind old eyes, "you'd better come away, my dear."

"I won't!" snapped her niece. "I'm here now, and I'll stay. I won't leave this room till I leave it as his promised wife. If he won't promise me that, I'll die here. But, oh, Ernest, you poor thing, *you* may die. But you won't die, will you, Ernest?"

The left eye of Mr. Ernest Dacre opened to its fullest extent, and then closed softly. "My dear," he whispered faintly, "I have no intention of dying just at present."

"I thank," said Aunt Tabitha to Aunt Mona some hours later, "I thank Heaven that that crazy girl has got someone to teach her sense at last."

"I echo the sentiment," replied her sister meekly.

Richard Sibert.

The Romance of a Door-mat.

I AM a door-mat.

He generally comes home from the club at about two in the morning. It is a great relief to feel that He is at home, as I can then resign myself to sleep without the fear of being trampled upon unexpectedly. When I know it is coming I do not mind it, as one can become used to anything.

When He first bought me the embroidered muslin curtains in that window over there were new. So was His wife, for that matter.

It appears that She is a door-mat also, although it must be some new kind. I know this, because I heard a lady who was calling say to her companion just as she pressed the bell:

"He simply walks on Her, my love!"

And the other said:

"I would never stand it, my dear!"

Which is all great nonsense if She really is a door-mat, as they are never consulted in the matter.

For a long time after this I regarded Her with curiosity. It seemed a strange thing for a door-mat to look out of a window night after night, with a perfectly white face, instead of lying down quietly that people might trample upon Her.

But I suppose there are door-mats and door-mats.

After a bit She was not as much at the window, and I saw two flitting shadows upon the embroidered muslin curtains quite often of an evening.

And I knew that a certain man with a guilty face, whom I had often seen with Him, was with Her then. I never liked the man. He had a way of looking about carefully before he tiptoed up the steps. One would say he was a thief.

Now there are feet and feet.

And I always hated his. When he stepped upon me it was always with his toes, and his narrow-pointed boots gave me many a vicious dig. I can stand heels, but I hate to be dug with these narrow-pointed toes.

He never walked in that way. He had a careless, square way of putting His foot on me which never hurt. And, as for Her feet—the feet of the Woman Door-Mat—I vow, I actually loved Hers. Dear little, careless feet!

"Such a heavy, heavy heart!" I heard Her whisper one night, as She ran across me. But Her little feet were light, for all that.

Once the man with the guilty face came home with Her just at dusk. And, as usual, he walked like a thief. And for an hour I saw their shadows on the curtains.

As he passed over me in coming out, digging his miserable pointed patent-leathers into me as he went, he was smiling, and I heard him mutter:

"I shall win Her! She shall be mine!"

Fool!

For he had told me his secret. I, his enemy, knew that he was trying to steal His Woman Door-Mat.

Queer, was it not? If he had really wanted a door-mat, why not have stolen me?

A few days before Christmas an intimate friend of mine came, the snow, and I talked it over. And between us we caught him.

I was simply immaculate that evening when the Guilty-faced Man came, for the snow had been falling softly, thus effacing every footprint. But as soon as he passed, tripping lightly from his cab, and tip-toeing over me with his narrow-pointed shoes, why, the snow waited, and I held those footprints as I had never held anything before.

And at ten he went, stepping upon me once more. The fool.

At midnight He came.

And it was such a white winter's night, with the snow and the starlight, that He noticed the prints upon me, as I intended He should. And I told Him all.

"I know that foot," said He. "It is the narrowest I ever saw. He knew I was not here. What——"

And He unlocked the door in a hurry and rushed within.

In the morning, when the housemaid aired the little library, the muslin curtains whispered to me that there had been trouble within the night before.

"Who called?" asked He.

"Don't you know?" replied the Woman Door-Mat nonchalantly.

"I was told that."

The Woman Door-Mat shrugged Her shoulders.

"He left me at the club."

"So he said."

"And knew—I was not here?"

"Naturally. He has usually selected those times for calling."

"My most intimate friend," said He, very slowly, looking at Her in sorrow. "And you infer——"

"Is it not always a man's most intimate friend who—but he knew as well when a woman is neglected?" And the Woman Door-Mat left the room.

But He sat there all through the night and early morning hours.

At last, on Christmas Eve, when they were returning from a ball together, He carried Her from the cab to the door, running lightly up the steps and setting Her down upon me. They were both laughing.

And as He placed Her upon me He kissed Her, while Her white arms stole out from Her furs and clung to Him. I knew that they were happy. Even a door-mat would have known that. It is absurd to be as happy as they were. There is no poetry in happiness.

And as He leisurely took His key from His pocket to unlock the door, He said:

"Dozie, I told you I was told that, you remember, the other night?"

"And who?"

"You are standing on him," He laughed.

Looking down She drew Her lace skirts aside, and glanced from me to Him, and then back again.

"That blessed, blessed door-mat!"

And then She sank upon Her knees, draggling Her laces in the snow. And kissed me. Oh, it is true. I swear it!

And I—a door-mat—thrilled wildly at the touch of those soft, smiling, pink lips. Probably no other door-mat in town has ever owned a like experience. Probably I shall never have another. Yet I am content.

One kiss!

But I have heard that there are kisses, one of which is worth a whole long lifetime, filled with the platitudes of other lips.

And that is my romance.

M. F. M.

THE BURDEN OF A BORROWED PERSONALITY.

By WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "Six First-Class Passengers," "Through the Valley," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

Who Cares for Caste in these New Days of Level?

A girl standing alone, looking wistfully into space and conjuring up a picture of the past. Herself and a man. The latter, dark, young, handsome; the former, fair, blue-eyed, and comely. The past was only yesterday.

"Why did he ever come here?" she asked, beating her temples with her fists. "Why did he look at me, speak to me, love me?"

She dug her nails into her palms to prevent herself shrieking aloud in her bitter condemnation of fate, as she realised how utterly and entirely she had fallen a victim to a stranger's whim.

Myra Grey recalled the events as she hid her misery and humiliation in the silent wood.

Alec Gordon had come to Ligeia Abbey as the solitary guest of old Mrs. Lysaght, an invalid lady of doubtful temper and peculiar habits, who spent the morning in bed, and the afternoon in a bath-chair, drawn up and down the terrace by a patient footman.

No wonder Satan found some mischief for his idle hands. Myra, with her unquestionable beauty, stepped from the lodge door and opened the gates as he rode by on the first morning, and Alec Gordon treasured the image of that striking personality through miles of dust down a country lane.

She had flung wide the gates of temptation, and without a thought of danger he stepped in to play with fire and meet his divinity on common ground.

He expected to find a bread-and-butter miss, an innocent country girl, knowing nothing above dairy work and scrubbing, ready to laugh away an hour with any good-looking youth that might fall in her way. But beneath the peach-like bloom and sunny smile of the lodge-keeper's daughter Alec Gordon discovered a mind!

None of the Society drones with whom he mixed daily had ever touched him as Myra did. Her conversation, like deep draughts of sea breezes, gave him an utterly new sensation. He felt he could face or dare anything for her. Only the night before, in that same spot, he had sworn to make her his wife, as they stood heart to heart and lip to lip under the shadow of the trees. The warning voice of the Abbey clock had aroused them, and Alec tore himself away, while Myra ran as a hunted stag through the gloom, with a strange ringing noise in her brain, and a stifling sensation at her throat.

The following morning, the sound of wheels attracting her attention, she hastened to the gates, and pushing them slowly back with bowed head, watched Alec Gordon drive away. The carriage returned from the station without him. He had caught the early train to town.

Just one glimpse into an unknown Heaven, and then to be thrust back—back!

She pressed her hands over her heart, raising her face to the sky. "Oh! Alec," she moaned, "Alec!"

The words, wrung from her by the bitterness of despair, fell on eager ears. Some one had followed her faltering steps, and in a moment two strong arms clasped her, while Alec Gordon's passionate lips pressed Myra's cheeks.

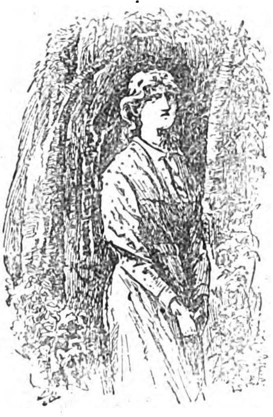
"My darling, did you doubt me?"

His words thrilled her, though she had merited their reproach.

"Why did you go?" she faltered, laughing through her tears.

"Why?" he said tenderly, reverentially, drawing something from his coat. "Have I not your promise, dear one?"

She gazed at the paper, swaying a little, like a flower on a tall, slim stem.



She dug her nails into her palms.

He thought how lovely she looked, standing in the sunset's glow.

"Is it a licence?" she asked, in an awed tone.

"What else should it be? A warrant for the arrest of your spinsterhood. Myra, are you afraid?"

He asked the question suddenly, an anxious look on his face, for she had bent her head, toying with some dead leaves. She caught her breath, her emotions were an echo of his.

"I would dare all for you, if you really love me?"

She glanced first at the green depths of foliage, then half timidly into his eyes. He reassured her with caresses and fond words.

They seated themselves on the ivy bench, weaving a thousand bewildering plans of action for the immediate future.

That night she did not run home through the woods, but walked down the broad drive, her head erect, and her breast swelling with pride and joy.

Love, the great beautifier, had irradiated her features, she seemed to be walking on air, over the smooth, yellow gravel.

She passed through the porch into the lodge, where her father sat smoking by the open window.

"You are late to-night, lass," he said, looking up as Myra entered.

She avoided his glance, and busied herself at the dresser. Myra and her father were the only occupants of Ligeia Abbey lodge.

"I have a letter here," he said, smoothing a sheet of paper on his knee, "from your Aunt Marian. She finds it that dull living alone at Hammersmith, and, feeling as how the country air would do her good, suggests taking up her abode with us."

Myra turned quickly. Fortune, indeed, favoured her.

"Oh! father, how nice. You were always so fond of your sister Marian."

She knelt by his side, laying her cheek on his dusty sleeve.

"Well, my girl, that's as you please," he replied, surprised in his turn. "But Aunt Marian has a mind of her own, and as you keep house and do things your own way, I thought possibly it might go against you."

"Well, father dear," continued Myra, "it is like this. I have lived a quiet country life so long in our little village, that if Aunt Marian would look after you I could seek a situation and see the world."

"I never thought you had a taste for service," he answered; "but there, I suppose it's natural for young people to make their own way. If you've set your heart on it, I won't gainsay you."

"Thanks, dear," she murmured, kissing him lightly on the forehead, "and now I will get your supper, for it is late."

She sang while arranging the evening meal. Her voice and movements were so light-hearted that the man in the window turned more than once to watch her in her work. He had straight features and a good shaped head, wore a shabby cloth suit, yet aspired to some sort of refinement.

"What's up with you Myra?" he asked at last, catching the glad light in her eyes. "Is it the thought of leaving your old home what's pleasing you, or has Phil the postman been at you again for an answer?"

Myra tossed her head indignantly; that Phil should have dared to aspire to Alec Gordon's affianced wife, seemed now an act of grossest impertinence.

"But he isn't good enough for you, my girl," said her father proudly, looking at his daughter's splendid physique. "No, if I were a woman with them eyes, I'd set the Thames a fire, and look to something 'igh and grand, before taking to the slavey trade."

For a moment Myra felt tempted to tell him, and her heart went out to her father as it had never done before. But she drew away, and began hastily cutting a loaf of bread.

"How is it," he said musingly, "that you're not the same as other girls in our station, Myra? Don't shake your head, lass. I'm not a fool, and I sees your dainty little feet and hands, and hears your voice—that different to mine. How have you managed it, eh? You're educated, too, and can tell me of things such as I never heard before. Where do you get your books and your learning?"

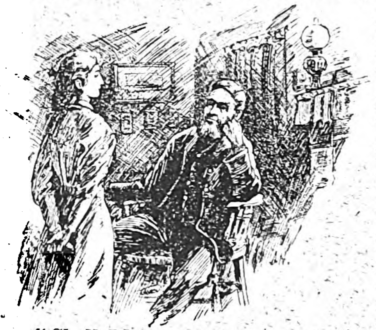
"Shall I let you into the secret?" she cried suddenly, dropping the bread knife, and stealing softly across the room to his side, "only you must promise never to repeat it!"

"Never!" he declared, with a chuckle, "fire away, my girl."

"You know what odd ideas old Mrs. Lysaght has about everything, and what a hermit she has become?"

"Yes, indeed. There's no company to speak of at the Abbey now."

"Well, Mr. Lysaght had a huge library built on to the house, which is stacked from floor to ceiling with thousands of books. They were his hobby, and he died in that room—suddenly, from an attack of heart disease, while stooping over a pile of volumes. Ever since, Mrs. Lysaght has held it sacred. No one but the maid enters, who dusts and cleans it every morning, opens the window, and locks the door as she leaves. Mrs. Lysaght only goes in on the anniversary of her husband's death. It is built on the level of the ground, and every day of my life I creep under the shadow of the wall, steal through the open window, and find myself there alone, yet surrounded by companions, friends. Great Heavens! how I have read, book after book, which had been left unopened for years. I am as well up in literature as any lady of the land. I have systematically smuggled myself into that room since childhood. It has been the one delight of my life, which made the monotonous hours fly. It gave me scope and interest, I have been to every quarter of the globe, and talked with kings and queens. It was a separate existence, a study apart, and I loved the great crowded shelves, the spice of danger, the fear of detection, and the exultation of success."



"Shall I let you into the secret?"

The old man gave a low whistle, and threw up his hands.

"My word! if the missus had caught you!" he cried.

Myra indulged in a low laugh.

"I would have given her a lecture on greed," she declared, with a defiant shrug of her shoulders; yet Myra's callousness was assumed, for she cherished a wholesome dread of Mrs. Lysaght. The exhilarating prospect of the wonderful unknown future made her peculiarly confidential and conversational that evening.

Mr. Grey began to wish as she drew his chair to the table, and placed the supper before him, that Aunt Marian would remain at Hammersmith for the rest of her natural existence.

He was too busy feeding himself, however, to notice that Myra ate nothing, but sat watching him with an expression of mingled amusement and sorrow.

"I am going to town to morrow for the day," she said, pouring out a tumbler of cold water, and drinking it in feverish haste. "I want to make inquiries about a place I have seen advertised, and I have saved plenty of money for a third return."

The man looked up from his plate with a startled expression.

"Going to town?" he said, and his eyes expanded as he spoke.

"Yes," she replied, a little sharply, fearing to find her aims, hopes, and desires frustrated. But her tone forbade argument, and lighting his pipe silently, her father walked out of the house. She watched him smoking in the garden, with a strange smile hovering round her lips. Then she went up quietly to bed, a great joy reigning in her heart.

"To-morrow," she said; "to-morrow! My wedding-day!"

CHAPTER II.

His Wedded Wife.

Myra returned from her visit to the great city flushed and happy, a bride in secret.

Alec was with her in a first-class compartment, which she was to vacate before reaching Eversley station.

"My darling," he murmured, "I can hardly realise you are my very own."

She looked down on the ring soon to be torn from its lawful resting-place and hidden in the folds of her simple grey dress.

Two tender arms clasped themselves suddenly round his neck, two lips that would be an angel's did not passion make them human, pressed his fervently.

"Husband!" she whispered, lingering over the word. Then with a little catch in her voice: "How is it all to end, dear, after this great beginning?"

"Worldly wisdom must solve the problem of our future happiness," he replied, gazing into the depths of her violet eyes; "and worldly wisdom at the present moment means silence. Our prospects might be ruined for ever if I made my marriage known immediately. You see, my uncle, Julian Shields, is very old, and a bachelor. He has made me his heir, and I shall inherit the family estate and a large income to keep it up. He is most eccentric, and there are other nephews to whom he might transfer his property if in any way I displeased him. Already he has one foot in the grave, so to upset him now would be suicide."

Myra's face grew troubled.

"Then we are to keep our secret till this man dies?" she asked tearfully.

"I trust not," he replied, aware of the sacrifice he was demanding at her hands. "But if only we could contrive some plan for you to meet my people and prejudice them in your favour before they know who you really are. My mother has such narrow ideas."

"Let me think," said Myra, pressing her hands to her forehead. There was silence for a moment, then she looked up. "You are right Alec, Mrs. Gordon would never acknowledge me as her daughter, probably never consent even to see me as your wife. If we met on equal ground, then I should have a chance. I would try to do you credit, but am I clever enough to act?"

She turned to him with an angelic smile.

"Clever!" he cried. "My darling, if I could get you to Saxbury Cross, my mother would be head over ears in love with you in a week. My Uncle Julian is coming to stay with us shortly, and, of course, if you were to win him over, then we *should* be on the top rail."

"I have it!" declared Myra. "Say that you met me at Ligeia Abbey, as a guest of Mrs. Lysaght, and persuade your mother to invite me to stay. I will change my identity entirely. Instead of Myra Grey, the lodge-keeper's daughter, I will be a lady who has moved in the best circles. You always have your own way at home, surely you could work this, Alec?"

"By Jove! It isn't a bad idea," he exclaimed.

"I will be Miss Granville—that was always a favourite name of mine. Myra Granville! Doesn't it sound nice?"

Alec was delighted at the thought of so enchanting a scheme.

"Myra Gordon," he laughed, "*alias* Granville, *alias* Grey! We shall find ourselves in a perfect maze of complications."

"But the first, the greatest step, has been taken to-day," said his wife, her lovely mouth dimpling into smiles. "Already I have paved my way to departure. Father thinks I've been to London about a situation, and the situation shall be Saxbury Cross."

"It is a daring venture," he replied, "but safe enough in your hands, dearest, if only I can conceal my mad and hopeless devotion to this new Miss Granville."

"It bewilders me," she whispered, "the thought of finding myself among people with whom I have never associated—to wear the purple and fine linen of an aristocrat, leading the life of which I have only read and dreamed. Oh! what a glorious transformation! I must order a regular outfit in London, and take it down with me from there. I shall not be too proud to let you pay for it, now that you are indeed my husband, and it is a necessity of our daring speculation. But, Alec, what if, after all, your mother refuses to invite me?"

"I will see to that," he replied confidently.

"Saxbury Cross is your river house, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes, quite an ideal place on the banks of the Thames, where my mother recruits after the season. I am sure you will like it. If Providence crowns our plans with the success they deserve, I shall feel really satisfied for the first time in my life."

"Don't make too sure, dear. Satisfaction is never realised in this world, content and pleasure, but not real genuine satisfaction. Something is always wanting—a hope for the to-morrow that never dawns."

Her words cast a momentary gloom over his spirits, as he clasped her to him in a tender yearning embrace.

"How strange that you should have ever come to Ligeia Abbey," she said at last, with a sigh of long suspended peace, as her head rested on his shoulder.

"Yes. Now I bless the fate that gave me a violent attack of influenza, and sent me to your bracing climate for change of air. I did not feel up to joining a house party, or there were dozens of places I might have gone to. Mrs. Lysaght has known me since a boy, and often asked me down to Eversley. On this occasion I availed myself of her offer, knowing I could have rest and quiet, and little thinking I should find my life's love at the Abbey gates."

"Isn't it deliciously romantic?" she sighed, "extraordinarily uncommon! I feel almost on the verge of Heaven, I am so happy."

Just at that moment the train steamed into the station before Eversley, and Myra sprang hurriedly to her feet.

"I must say good-bye to the nice cushions," she cried laughingly, waving her hand towards the blue-covered seats, "and return to my natural sphere, the dusty unattractive third. 'Lowliness is young ambition's ladder,'" she quoted. "I don't believe you ever read Shakespeare!"

He watched her flitting down the platform, with passionate longing eyes. He dared not even accompany her to the door, for fear of observation.

"What a bright glad soul she has!" he thought, "so delightfully unconventional, so spontaneous and refreshing!"

He looked over the fair meadow country as the train steamed out, but saw only Myra's face in the green fields, and red brick gabled houses, curtained with virginia-creeper, untouched as yet by autumn's blood-dipped fingers.

When Alec Gordon arrived at Eversley, Mrs. Lysaght's old-fashioned chariot met the train, and for a wonder Mrs. Lysaght's heavily-craped black bonnet was within.

"I am feeling so much stronger to-day that I ventured out for a drive," she told him, as he took his seat, watching Myra's slim figure in the distance, wending its way down the dusty road. "It is really very annoying, Alec, that you should have been obliged to take that fatiguing journey to town two days running, on business. But you look remarkably well. I think the Eversley air has worked wonders."

"I never felt better in my life," he declared. "My mother will hardly know me."

"I am afraid you have had a very dull visit—a sadly monotonous time, with only an old woman for a companion."

"Oh! not at all. I've enjoyed myself immensely. The country is so beautiful! It has been one long, delicious daydream."

The old lady looked at him sharply through her glasses.

"That isn't like you," she said. "I never heard you make a sentimental remark before in your life. 'Delicious daydream!' it sounds quite mawkish and dreadful. I hope you have not inherited your dear father's one and only failing. Such a good, genuine, companionable fellow, and a most devout churchman, but was seized in his old age with a desire to write little sonnets and ballads. He even went so far as to publish them in papers, of which your poor mother sadly disapproved. I remember him puzzling me dreadfully with some rubbish he called: 'The Rondeau Redoublé,' 'Pantoum,' and 'Kyrielle.' Bah! I despise such twaddle."

"I believe he wrote well, but you need not fear I have a genius for poetry. I could not coin a rhyme to save my life."

"Do not be too confident, the taint is in your blood!" snapped Mrs. Lysaght. "Poets, I consider an immoral race, screaming themselves hoarse with lays of love to women they have never seen, and exciting the young not infrequently to suicide, or worse still, social degradation!" Her words seemed almost prophetic, as she lashed the children of the muse with her tongue of scorn. "But tell me what you have been doing in London," she continued, as they passed through the Abbey gates.

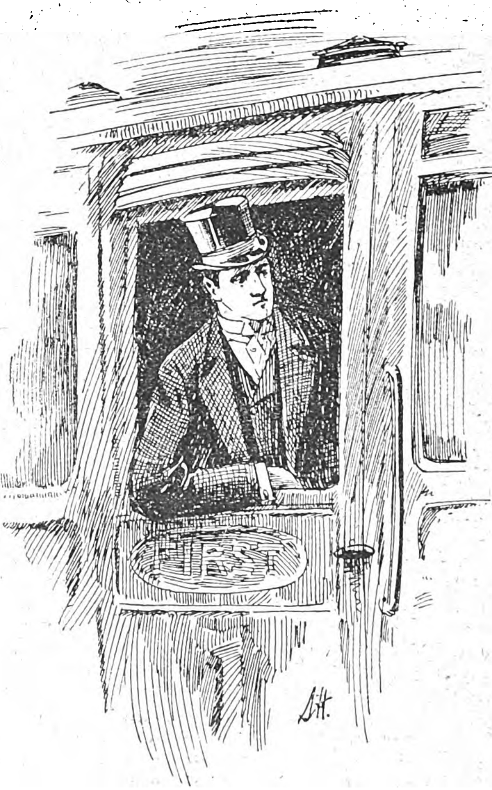
Alec could see his father-in-law digging up pansy roots, and the relationship struck him as so absurd that he burst into a fit of sudden uncontrollable mirth.

"Why are you laughing?" asked Mrs. Lysaght.

Alec's face grew grave again, as he realised the crisis he had reached in his life.

"I was picturing myself one of the long-haired tribe, penning a triolet to the charms of Ligeia Abbey."

"Good," she replied. "We seldom practice what we ridicule. I am sure you must be pining for your dinner, and I have ordered something indigestible for a treat."



He looked over the fair meadow country.

"Thanks. I am quite off the sick list by now," said Alec, thinking of his poor little Myra sitting down to bread and cheese.

Mrs. Lysaght's caustic mood gradually expanded into benevolence, and during the evening she became quite extraordinarily pleasant and confidential, enlarging on her money affairs, and complaining of her trustees. She recounted the death-bed scenes of all her family, from her great grandmother downwards, and gave Alec a sermon on the subject of love and matrimony, to which he listened with good-humoured indifference.

"You *do* look well!" she declared again, when the family annals were exhausted, and he still retained a smiling tolerance. "The quiet routine of Ligeia Abbey has done you all the good in the world. Like the majority of young people in the present day, you live yourself out. Your pleasures become a labour, and all capacity for enjoyment is worn to the bones!"

"My days are not in the yellow leaf yet," he replied cheerfully; "besides, it is a pity to moulder and rust."

Then he became suddenly silent and constrained, for his thoughts were with the lodge-keeper's daughter, who was gazing through her latticed window at the distant lights of Ligeia Abbey.

CHAPTER III.

THE POWER OF SELF-CULTURE.

MYRA was dusting the parlour, looking in her clean print dress the incarnation of youth and happiness.

"Father, it is all fixed," she said, glancing at a crested envelope peeping from the pocket of her apron. "I am to go to Saxbury Cross, and have had a letter from Mrs. Gordon engaging me this morning. If I don't like it I shall come home again."

"I'll be missing you, lass," said the old man, shaking his head. "But there, no one shall say that Joseph Grey stood in his girl's light when she wanted to earn her own living. It strikes me, Myra, this lady is a bit fussy and particular in her way of engaging servants. She's had you to see her in London four or five times at least. Why couldn't she make up her mind about you at first?"

Myra flushed as she thought of her various interviews with fashionable dressmakers, and the delightful days shopping in town.

"All is fair in love and war," she told herself. "My deception must continue."

"You are right, father," she said. "Mrs. Gordon is peculiar, and it depends greatly on my own tact and common sense whether we hit it off, or if Saxbury Cross proves only a brief episode in my life."

"How many servants do they keep?"

"I—I don't know. I didn't ask."

"Well, you're a rum lot, and no mistake! What did you do about a character?"

"I haven't got one," sighed poor Myra, becoming momentarily more confused.

"Then the sooner you get one the better, my girl."

"Mrs. Gordon knows Mrs. Lysaght, so it will be all right."

"You seem to have gone about it in a queer way, but I ain't one to hinterfere. Now, when your Aunt Marian comes she'll put you through a fine catechism, and as like as not see you to the place herself. She's that curious!"

For a moment Myra's blood ran cold, then a gasp of relief involuntarily escaped her.

"Aunt Marian does not arrive till the day after I leave," she vouchsafed; "and by the way, father, Mrs. Gordon did not like the name Myra. She said it was too fanciful."

"Just what I told your dear mother, when she read them novels, and talked much as you talk now, of things above her station. 'Myra ain't a fit name for our sort,' says I. 'Let it be Jane, or Anna, or something holy, such as Ruth and Elizabeth.' But she just closes her eyes in them last moments, and repeats 'Myra' two or three times, and then she was took."

He brushed a tear from his wrinkled cheek. Though he did not read himself, he had treasured his wife's books, with their torn covers, for years.

"I am glad she thought of that name," said the girl; "it seems to give me individualty. I know three Elizabeths and five Janes, and Phil's sister is Anna Ruth."

"What will Mrs. Gordon call you?" he asked.

"Her servants go by their surnames, and as the lady's maid is 'Grey,' I am to be 'Granville.' It sounds rather well, doesn't it?"

"Too 'ighflown for my liking."

"But she must be humoured, father, so mind! whenever you write (which won't be often), address the letter to *Miss Granville.* While I am at Saxbury Cross I bear that name. You won't forget?"

"Not if you leave it written down, for I don't know 'ow to spell it."

Myra laughed as she committed it to paper, in a large legible hand.

"And now," she said, "I am going to take a farewell of the dear old library, a last look at those book companions of my childhood. I love them all."

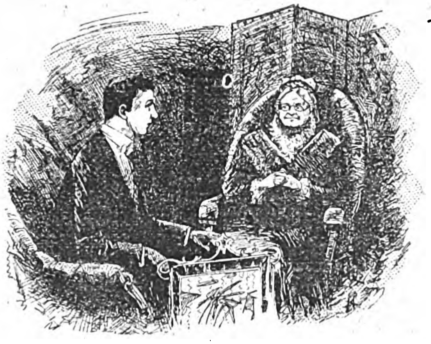
"Take care the missus doesn't catch you," said her father, as she slipped away.

Myra crept under the thick bushes till she reached the open window. Alec had gone, and for the moment her life felt blank and empty. The long low room with its shelves of well bound volumes appealed to Myra as friends. All her young life's love seemed buried in their leaves, and they would go out into the world with her—a sacred memory. She realised the intellectual endowments she owed to their teaching, the width and breadth they had imparted to her narrow sphere.

At first she read for pure pleasure, and from a certain feminine curiosity. Then the idea of self-culture came to her, not as a dream, but a possibility. But for her secret act of daring, Myra might have slumbered to the end of life. Something she came upon while searching through those well-stocked walls stirred and awoke a new conviction.

Two powers of the human mind make self-culture possible, the self-searching and the self-forming power. To begin with, she learnt that her own nature was worthy of observation, and saw in herself the germs and promises of a growth, to shoot beyond the little boundary of her cottage home.

She penetrated into her nature, and discovered a spirit, at first so shadowy and unreal, that only a dark vague chaos appeared. But Myra had fixed her eyes on perfection, and from that day her intellectual progress commenced, expanding year by year. There seemed a natural elasticity in her being, a desire to be built up. She cultivated a perception of beauty, feeling its all-pervading presence in the clouds and the stars and the setting sun. The flowers gradually stirred some new interest in her heart, and the green blades of grass, and the trees in the wood, (till it became akin to worship. She saw her father living blind to the fair earth and glorious sky. He was like the tenant of a dungeon; he could not comprehend or feel the loveliness and grandeur of the world around him.



"You do look well," she declared again.

Besides all this, Myra cultivated the power of utterance and speech. She began to notice that Joseph Grey never opened his lips without breaking a rule of grammar, and his uncouth tones jarred on her sensibility.

It must not be imagined that the correction of these errors in herself had not caused Myra unrelaxing toil and attention. Her culture had been acquired under grave difficulties. As she stood, perhaps for the last time, in the silent library, such a flow of gratitude leapt up in her heart, that she stretched out her arms spontaneously and pressed her lips to the lifeless walls.

She would have liked to fling herself at the feet of Mrs. Lysaght and bless her for the privileges received under her roof, but she knew too well the horror any such revelation would cause that wholly selfish and egotistical lady. Myra could picture the curl of Mrs. Lysaght's lip as she confessed her daily intrusion—the rooted resolve to fasten on to knowledge as her Great End—to make the most of the powers God had given her, which burnt like living fires in her soul.

"No; the dead should be thanked," thought Myra—"the dead man that built this room, and the dead of past ages who wrote these books."

Through their undying talent she had obtained intercourse with superior minds. Milton had crossed the threshold to sing of Paradise to the hungering country girl; Shakespeare opened the worlds of imagination for her benefit; while Franklin enriched her with practical wisdom. Myra held her breath at the great thought, and then as she stood dreaming, her favourite authors passed before her in the morning sunlight—a solemn procession—while she grasped their hands and said farewell. Walter Scott was the last in the line, and she stopped him to contemplate his inexhaustible mind. How she had been chained to his pages, steeped in forgetfulness of cares and sorrows, her whole life brightened by his magical creations!

"Good-bye," she murmured, half regretfully, watching the vanishing figures of her phantom friends. As they faded Myra knelt under the shadow of their great works and thanked God for what she had gained.

Then she walked thoughtfully back to the lodge.

"Society," she told herself, "is divided into two classes, the high born and the vulgar, separated from one another by a great gulf. I shall have overstepped the gulf when I enter Saxbury Cross as the guest of Mrs. Gordon. The path to perfection is difficult for all; there is no royal road for rich or poor. I may be the medium to bring her to wider, freer views."

"Myra! Myra!"

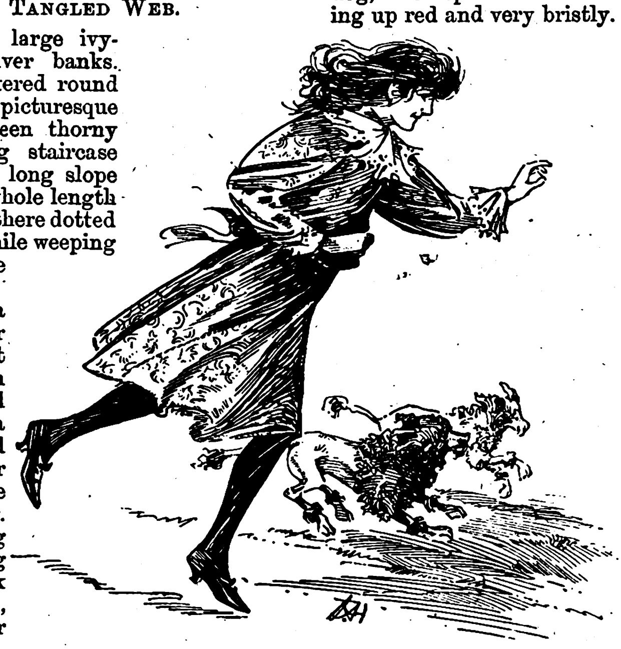
It was her father's voice.

"The cat's upset the kettle and scalded herself. How slow you are, Myra!"

"I am coming, father."

CHAPTER IV.

Weaving the Tangled Web.



Penelope sped off, followed by the poodles.

Saxbury Cross was a large ivy-covered house on the river banks. Roses yellow and red clustered round the windows and over the picturesque balcony, trailing their green thorny branches down a winding staircase leading to the lawn. A long slope of well-kept turf ran the whole length of river frontage, here and there dotted by gaily-flowered beds, while weeping willows stooped to kiss the soft ripples of the Thames.

The peaceful glow of a summer evening was over everything, shadows crept under the trees, and sun rays lingered on the gravel walks. Across the river a sound of distant bells and the rush of a far off weir mingled faintly with the occasional splash of an oar.

A little girl was sitting in an arbour overlooking the river, her short frock barely covering her knees, and her legs coiled under her on a deck chair.

Two extravagantly affectionate poodles nestled at her side, one pawing the long brown locks on her shoulders, the other licking two sunburnt hands shading a laughing face.

"Go away," she cried. "I won't be kissed any more!"

"My dear Penelope, do send those tiresome dogs to the stables," said her mother.

In a moment the girl's arms were clasping them both, and lavishly caressing each eager black nose in turn.

"I wish Uncle Julian wasn't coming," she retorted passionately. "He always brings that horrid Satan with him, and the poor twins have to be banished, unless they wish to be torn to pieces. I wonder you allow such a vicious brute to run rampant over the house."

"You know your uncle will not come without him, so what is the good of talking?" replied Mrs. Gordon, a tall elegant woman with raven black hair, untouched by grey, and a figure which would have done justice to a girl. "Take them away at once, Penelope, he may be here at any minute, and you know I am expecting Alec's friend—Miss Granville."

The child rose reluctantly, and whistled to the black poodles, who, anticipating their fate, had scampered away, romping and bounding, amongst the flower beds.

"No wonder Uncle called his dog Satan," she declared solemnly. "Mr. Danby said he was sure he was possessed of a devil—the dog—not uncle I mean."

"What an idea!"

"Well, Mr. Danby is a clergyman, and ought to know." She nodded her head wisely. "Besides, mad dogs are dangerous, and even Uncle Julian owns he is cracked."

"There, run away and give the twins in charge," said her mother, smiling.

Penelope sped off, followed by the poodles, leaping up and barking. She had only just gone, when an old man leaning on a stick came tottering down the garden path, followed by an evil-looking Chinese edible dog, who kept close to his master, his bushy coat standing up red and very bristly.

"Alethea!" cried Julian Shields, putting up a gold-rimmed eyeglass, and scrutinising her face, "as young as ever and as beautiful, yes, as beautiful!" he chuckled, giving her a skinny bloodless hand.

"Bring tea out here," said Mrs. Gordon to the servant, after returning her brother's greeting. "You will have a cup before dinner, Julian?"

"It is late, quite late," he replied, with his customary habit of repeating words, "but I'll not refuse your kind offer. Tea is my weakness you know, Alethea; we all have our vices."

He called back the retreating servant, and pointed to his dog.

"Satan will take a bowl of milk," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"And a little bread in it, broken up small; no crust, remember. You see, Alethea, I always make myself at home with you. Satan's teeth are decayed; he lives almost entirely on sops."

Mrs. Gordon stooped to pat the dog's head, but he showed his well-worn teeth, and she withdrew her hand accordingly.

"It is only his manner," declared Mr. Shields, with a lenient smile. "Satan is rather affected, and has adopted the satirical tendency of the age."

As he spoke, he drew a third chair forward for the animal, who rose sulkily on to the cushions, with a suspicious glance at Mrs. Gordon. She edged away.

"Where is Alec?" he asked.

"Driven over to Settleworth station to meet a friend of his, whom he asked me to invite here. He says she is very pretty, and I am sure to like her. They met at Eversley, while he was staying with Mrs. Lysaght."

"I am glad she's pretty; ugly people spoil my digestion—one of my weaknesses again, Alethea. I've a perfect mass of them ready at a moment's notice, I assure you."

"Here is your tea, Julian, with the dog's milk. I had mine an hour ago. Cream and sugar?"

"Neither, thanks; good pure tea, unsullied by et ceteras." He balanced the cup in one quavering hand. "Oh, yes!" quickly changing his mind, "pass me the cream jug, will you?"

She handed it to him.

"Ah! this is what Satan likes," he declared, emptying the contents into the dog's bowl. "He is a thorough *gourmet*."

"Mamma! mamma! Miss Granville has arrived; Alec is bringing her through the balcony."

Penelope rushed up excitedly, for she had caught a glimpse of Myra's rose-garlanded hat, and heard a low musical voice. "I know she is simply sweet," she added in an undertone, "and amusing, too. Alec was laughing. Oh! I beg your pardon, Uncle Julian, I quite forgot to say how do you do!"

She bent down dutifully, and kissed his wrinkled cheek.

A moment later and Myra's graceful figure advanced across the lawn.

As her eyes met Mrs. Gordon's she smiled charmingly, and a strange thrill passed over her when Alec's mother took her hand. For the moment Myra feared her presence of mind would desert her, and the whole imposture shrivel and die under Mrs. Gordon's clear gaze and pleasant words of welcome.

But Alec came quickly forward and joined in the conversation, eagerly watching Myra's expression, in which he read no sign of faltering.

Julian Shields tottered to his feet and scrutinised the new-comer.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, Miss Granville," he said, as Mrs. Gordon introduced him; "delighted, I'm sure. Eh! your first visit to this dear old place? Let me present you to Father Thames."

He pointed to the river. Myra gazed over the mystic tide, to the bright opalescence of the sky. The old man saw the dreamy look in her eyes.

"You are a lover of the beautiful," he said. "The flowing stream and soft summer night have a certain fascination."

"What is fascination?" said Myra thoughtfully. "I have often tried to analyse it, and failed."

"You've only to look in the glass to know," he replied with a little cackling laugh.

Alec overheard.

"What! compliments already?" he cried jokingly, putting his arm through his uncle's. "Come, this will never do, you get younger every day."

Julian Shields liked his nephew's free and easy manner. It was part of Alec's charm.

"What a lot of boats you have!" said Myra, turning to Mrs. Gordon.

"Yes, you must try them all. Penelope is a very good skipper, and will punt, canoe, or sail you at any time."

"But you have not introduced me yet," said a plaintive voice at her elbow.

Myra held out her hand to the pretty child, and kissed her upturned face. A sensation of joy filled her being—Alec's sister had pressed her lips.

"Your face seems strangely familiar," croaked Mr. Shields. "Are you one of the Granville's, of Fort Granite—the Leicestershire branch, I mean?"

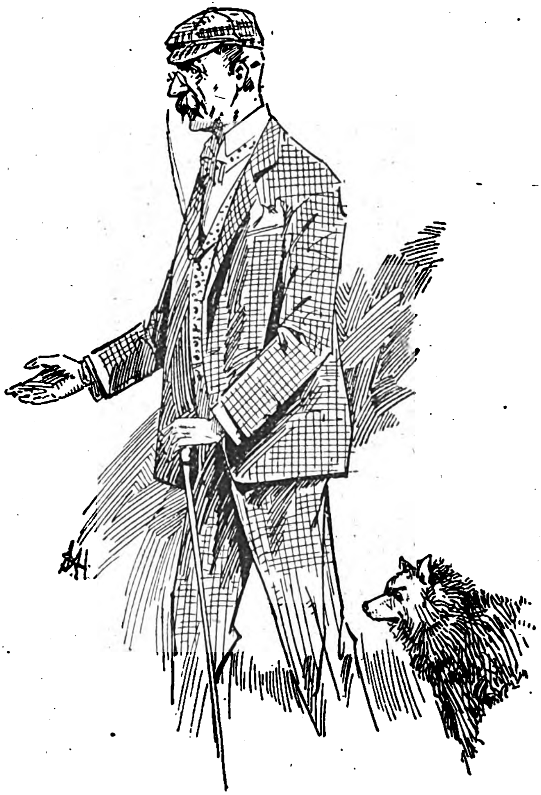
Myra looked wildly round to Alec for support, and he changed the subject by intentionally stumbling against his uncle's gouty foot.

"What a clumsy beggar you are!" he muttered, as his nephew apologised.

"Were you at Ascot last year, Miss Granville?" he continued. "You are so very like a niece of Lady Maitland, I remember seeing there. Her aunt would not introduce me for fear I should lose my heart at first sight. The young lady was engaged to a fellow in the 16th Lancers, and we lunched in their tent."

"I could not go last year," replied Myra, flushing. "I was in the country."

"Dear me, what a sultry night!" almost groaned Alec. "I feel like a martyr of old, boiled alive! I shall rig up a tent on the lawn and sleep out of doors."



"Delighted to make your acquaintance, Miss Granville."

"Don't be absurd," from Penelope. "You might get rheumatism, and die."

"It is too hot for reason."

"Yes," put in Myra, flicking away the gnats, "my thoughts melt into a shapeless mass when thousands of thirsty midges are biting me!"

Mrs. Gordon declared it was time to go in and dress, and Myra accompanied her, leaving Alec with his uncle.

"By Jove! that's a pretty girl," said Julian Shields, watching the retreating figure, "a confoundedly pretty girl! Where did you pick her up, Alec?"

"Miss Granville lives at Eversley."

"Very fine eyes, and a beautiful under-lip—but put not your trust in women Take this wrinkle from me," lighting a cigar, and puffing at the tormenting flies: "They are as weak and unstable as these rings of smoke.

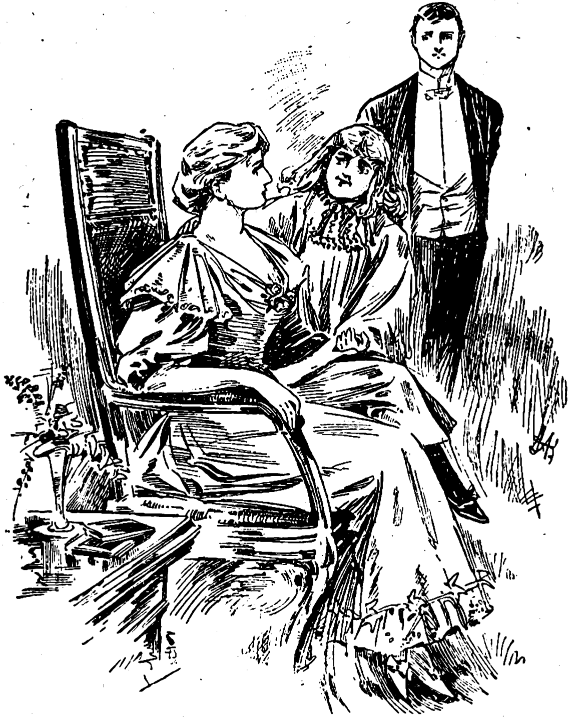
No woman is worth as much as that old dog in the chair. He is wife and child to me."

"I am glad you have such a faithful friend, uncle."

"Yes, and a tiresome friend, too, at times. I am obliged to reserve a carriage for him when travelling. Satan objects to the passengers—or they object to him. He hates everybody but his old master—that is what draws me to the creature. He would have a piece out of your leg now if he dared."

"Where would you like him to sleep?"

"With me, of course. He'd howl the house down if I turned him out of my room. But oh! how he dreams.



Penelope came down before dinner to say good-night.

My dear boy, I assure you that dog has kept me awake for an hour sometimes in the night, killing an imaginary cat. By the way, I hope there is no tame kitten about?"

"Yes, Penelope has a little Persian with a pie-bald tail."

"It must be sent away, then, or Satan will eat it on the spot. Mind you see that it goes, Alec. I should be extremely sorry if my presence here caused any unpleasantness in the house."

Meanwhile, Myra, for the first time in her life, was donning a dinner gown.

She felt a little shy, and rather odd about the neck, but her dazzling reflection in the mirror reassured her.

"This is the life I was made for," she thought, running her eyes over the spacious apartment.

"I feel like an actress masquerading in a gorgeous scene, soon to be shorn of its splendour. The walls ought to fall about my head and crush me."

But as she looked at the bright eyes and delicate colouring of Myra Grey, in Myra Granville's soft white draperies, the words of Thomas Otway came to her mind. "Oh! woman! lovely woman! Angels are painted fair to look like you." Her heart beat higher.

The maid was putting the finishing touches to her toilette, when she turned suddenly, an anxious inquiry in her eyes.

"Is this dress becoming?" she asked. "I have not worn it before."

"Yes, miss. White, I am sure, is your speciality."

"Miss!" How queerly the word re-echoed in her brain.

"Would you advise me to wear this fichu over my—my throat?" she asked falteringly.

"Oh! no, miss. It would be a sin to cover such a lovely neck."

"Thank you," said Myra simply.

Then she went down to the rose-tinted drawing-room, and lounged in a low arm-chair, under a deep red lamp, casting a rich glow on the pink walls.

Beside her sat her husband, and as she conversed with him in the ordinary tones of a casual acquaintance, she pressed her hand to her heart, and felt something small and round lying upon it, the simple band of gold that linked their fates in one.

Penelope came down before dinner to say good-night, and perched herself on the arm of Myra's chair, already feeling quite at home with the new comer.

"You live at Eversley, don't you?" she said.

"Yes," replied Myra.

"I thought so. I went there once with Mamma. We were staying at Emberton, five miles away, and drove over one afternoon. Where is your house?"

Myra considered a moment. She felt herself growing hot all over.

"It is—near the station," she answered vaguely.

"A pretty place surrounded in trees?" cried Penelope.

"No; you are thinking of Hazel Court."

"Yes," put in Mrs. Gordon, "where the Montagues live. Do you know them, Miss Granville?"

"They are never there," answered Alec hastily. "Mr. Montague was obliged to go abroad for his health, and his daughter married. The old place is going to rack and ruin."

"I think you are mistaken, Alec. He lends it to his cousin for the hunting," continued Mrs. Gordon. "I dare say you have met that celebrated sportsman?" turning to Myra. "His wife, Mrs. Bryce, is very charming, and entertains tremendously."

"I don't remember having seen her at Eversley," said Myra. "I dare say I was away at the time."

"What is the name of your house?" asked Penelope.

As she spoke the clock struck.

"Your bed-time, old lady," said Alec, pulling the child off the chair, and saving Myra from answering an awkward question.

"Need I go yet?" asked Penelope, turning to her mother. "I like talking to Miss Granville." Then attacking the visitor afresh: "You *will* tell me about your home, won't you? Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"I am an only child."

"You must have been very dull when you were little. Where did you go to school? because there is no school in Eversley. I've got so much to ask you!"

"Wait till to-morrow," replied Myra, as the dinner gong sounded, "and I'll think of some stories."

"I never heard anybody cross-question like Penelope," said Alec. "It is a perfect habit, and she ought to be broken of it. Don't humour her, Miss Granville, for if you do you will not have a moment's peace while you are here."

"I must resort to invention, for it is so long since I was at school, I have forgotten all about it."

Mrs. Gordon looked at the visitor's youthful countenance.

"A very long time, I am sure!" she said smiling.

CHAPTER V.

AN OLD FOOL.

WITHOUT doubt Myra was a decided success at Saxbury Cross, her husband having schooled her so effectually that she managed to keep up the character of Miss Granville with little exertion.

For the first few days he frequently caught a bewildered look in her eyes, responding unfailingly to their secret appeal. But these occasions became few and far between.

The new life developed a surprising amount of tact and quick comprehension in Myra. Everyone was fond of her, and especially Julian Shields.

"It really is quite a nuisance," she confided to Alec. "Your uncle follows me about like a faithful dog. He may be a very dear old gentleman, but his society is apt to pall."

They were drifting under the Saxbury Cross willows, Alec leaning on his oars.

"I cannot realise I was once Myra Grey," she said, her eyelids drooping half shyly under his glance.

"Let us stay here out of the stream, dearest," he replied, fastening the boat to a bough. "It is so seldom I can have you to myself. Why, the amount of time you spend with Uncle Julian and that terrible dog is most wearisome."

"Do not complain," she whispered, smoothing his forehead with a feathery blade of grass. "It is just as well he likes to be with me. I assure you last night on the balcony, after dinner, you would have thought he was an amorous boy."

"Lunatics thrive in the moonlight," said Alec, capturing her slim hand, crushing the wild forget-me-nots she held.

The glory of the summer evening cast a spell over them, and for a while they sat watching the sun in a crimson cloud dyeing the mirror below with red. Sedges and rushes rose above the shallow water—it was an ideal spot.

"What a heavenly evening to love!" she murmured romantically.

Alec, more prosaic, looked from the picturesque sunset into Myra's eyes.

"What a heavenly little woman to love!" he said, with a sigh of content, half wondering, as he scanned her daintily gowned figure, if this could be the same Myra he won in the Ligeia woods.

"How have you managed to change your personality?" he asked.

"That is a puzzle," she said. "It quite perplexes me! I do not understand it in the least. I cannot analyse the change, but it has taken place gradually. I seem to have grown into an unknown sphere, and lost touch with my past self."

As she spoke Penelope's figure appeared on the lawn, and a shrill childish voice called: "Alec!"

"What is it, Pen?" he asked, looking up from the boat.

"Uncle wants Miss Granville, and he is in an awful rage at not finding her."

"Look here! Can't you keep him out of the way?" said her brother coaxingly. "We didn't ask Miss Granville here to bore her to death. I'll give you a shilling if you do."

The child consented to the bribe, but demanded her shilling first.

Alec tossed it on to the bank laughingly, watching it roll along the gravel path.

Before she could pick it up Satan had leaped out of some neighbouring bushes, and snatched the coin between his teeth.

"Good dog! good dog, Satan!" chuckled the old man, appearing as if by magic on the scene. "He always sticks to money."

"The old miser!" muttered Alec, as Satan scratched a hole in the ground for the reception of his spoil.

"You have been on the water quite long enough, Miss Granville, in that thin white dress," croaked Mr. Shields. "The sun has set, and a mist is rising. Won't you come for a stroll with me, and finish our interesting discussion on the elevation of the labouring classes?"

Myra consented with feigned pleasure. Julian Shields was the trump card on which all her aims and hopes depended, and she could not afford to refuse.

The old man, delighted at taking her from his nephew, hobbled away, leaving Alec to vent his wrath on the offending Satan and restore the stolen money to its rightful owner.

"What a shame!" cried Penelope, with a scornful glance at the retreating figures. "I wouldn't stand being monopolised by *him* if I were Miss Granville. She gets plenty of admiration without Uncle Julian."

"Plenty!" said Alec sharply. "Who else is there?"

The child laughed.

"Why, you silly boy, anybody can see you are in love with her yourself, and you'll be very lucky if she has you. She's the loveliest girl I've ever seen. Why don't you ask her, Alec? A cat may look at a king!"

"Go along, you little chatterbox, and mind your own business," he answered good-naturedly; and Penelope wondered why he gave her another shilling to add to Satan's.

Myra had wandered out of sight with her companion.

"Yes," he was saying, "your views are surprisingly intellectual, Miss Granville. So often nowadays the young people can talk of nothing but fashions and parties—I like the word 'party,' it reminds me of my childhood. But, to continue our subject, I quite agree with your opinions, and look myself for the salvation of the modern world in the elevation of the labouring classes. I see with joy new wants, principles, and aspirations beginning to unfold themselves. Have you ever visited among the poor?"

"Oh, frequently," retorted Myra. "I understand them well."

"And doubtless find the majority steeped in ignorance?"

"Yes," she replied, unable to explain away the tears in her eyes. "It is so hard for them to improve, Mr. Shields—harder than you can possibly realise. How should a half-famished, uneducated working-man, who toils for wages, think of personal improvement? He cannot cultivate the perception of beauty, and he has scarcely ever opened a book. I do not know one labourer in Eversley whose mind is bent on self-enlargement. They have no time to study or comprehend."

"You are contradicting yourself, Miss Granville; a moment since you said it was possible."

"Yes—then I was thinking of the women; but they must begin young—very young—before they are dragged down to the level of their fellows."

"You have evidently considered the subject. I wonder you have time to spare a moment for those poor creatures so far below you."

"Indeed, they are very near my heart. I know their difficulties; I have seen so much of it."

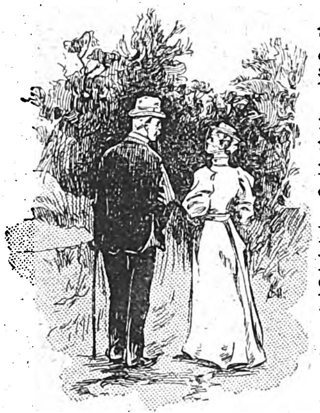
"You are the last person in the world I should have pictured visiting the poor."

"Why?"

"You hate the seamy side of life, and love the beautiful." He took her arm. "Walk a little slower, my dear; I can't keep pace with you."

"I beg your pardon," said Myra humbly.

For the first time since arriving at Saxbury Cross her conscience rebuked her for the lie she was living. Misgivings, apprehensions, and piercing self-rebuke weighed heavily upon her spirits.



"You are the last person in the world I should have pictured visiting the poor."

"Do you think it wrong to step right out of your own walk in life and pry into another?" she asked.

"Certainly not. If you really take an interest in the lower classes, and do not visit them out of curiosity."

"But you would not like a poor woman to push her way into your circle? You would not listen to her?"

"I should, if she had anything sensible to say."

"Would your sister, Mrs. Gordon?"

"I can't answer for Alethea. She is so easily disturbed, and would probably pour out her indignation on the unfortunate wretch, with the Christianity one woman occasionally shows to another beneath her."

"How sceptical you are!"

"If anyone could make me otherwise it would be you, Miss Granville. My opinion of the weaker sex has gradually undergone a change in the atmosphere of your influence. 'A noble woman, nobly planned,'" he quoted, looking at her with deepest admiration. "I have discovered your chief charm, my dear, if you will forgive an old man's candour. It is the lack of affectation and conceit in one fair enough to tyrannise over the whole masculine race, and be forgiven. Take my advice, dear lady; stick to your unfailing good nature, as to health, youth, and beauty. It pays, Miss Myra—it pays."

"You are very kind," she murmured, lowering her eyes.

He took her hand and pressed it to his shrivelled lips.

"You have kindled new life in me," he said, "to enjoy the pure companionship of a genuine English girl is a stimulant!"

In her voyage of discovery after fresh impressions, Myra forgot her guilty conscience, now soothed to slumber by the soft words of Alec's uncle. She had come to conquer, and the victory seemed almost in her grasp. The distracting glare of day had vanished, and the twilight calmed her nerves.

"Will you be my friend for life?" she asked tremulously. "I should like you always to keep your present opinion of me. I want to feel that whatever happens in the future I may count on Mr. Shield's good word."

His face glowed with satisfaction and pride.

"There is my hand on it!" he said.

"Is it a compact?" she whispered, with a tender glance at the old man.

"For life!" he replied fervently.

She hardly knew how it happened, but Mr. Shields drew suddenly nearer, and pressed a hasty kiss upon her forehead.

Then dropping her hand, he turned and hobbled away, muttering: "I'm an old fool, by George! I'm an old fool!"

When Alec found Myra, she was alone on a garden seat.

"How thoughtful you look," he said, noting the far-away expression in her eyes. "Is anything the matter?"

"I was pondering over the problem of my changed personality," she replied dreamily, "and thinking of 'an old fool'!"

CHAPTER VI.

A DÉBUTANTE IN SECRET.

"ARE you fond of dancing, Miss Granville?" asked Alec's mother one morning.

"It is rather too warm this weather," she hesitatingly replied, not daring to confess her utter ignorance of the art.

She had dreaded this subject since observing a card for Lady Hayter's ball among Mrs. Gordon's invitations.

"It is Barbara's 'coming-out' ball," Mrs. Gordon vouchsafed, glancing towards Alec. "She will look lovely!"

"Is Barbara Lady Hayter's daughter?" asked Myra.

"Yes; the only girl, and as clever as she is beautiful. It is her eighteenth birthday. By the way, Alec, I want you to drive over this morning and leave my little present."

"What is it?" he asked indifferently.

"A sapphire bangle. You might take Miss Granville if she cares to go."

Myra brightened considerably.

"Let us try Olivette, the bay mare, in the buggy," Alec said, watching every change in his wife's face with a lover's quickness. "How soon can you be ready?"

"Directly. I'll get my hat at once."

Mrs. Gordon had risen from the table, and watched Myra as she tripped away.

"How charming she looks in that cool mauve cotton; it suits her admirably," she said, with an approving smile. "Lady Hayter was positively fascinated by your new friend, Alec, and she is rather difficult to please."

Myra returned, in a large muslin hat decked with flowers.

"I am ready," she said.

"Mrs. Gordon watched them go with a little sigh. She could not grudge Alec his happiness, though she had all a mother's fear of losing her only son.

As they drove off alone, with Olivette stepping out before them, Alec turned anxiously to his wife.

"Why were you so pale at breakfast?" he asked. "Were you nervous about anything?"

"I can't go to the ball. I—I must have a headache and stay at home!"

"Why?"

"Oh! don't you see, don't you know, I can't dance! Every lady dances as a matter of course, it is part of her education. How could I possibly go with your mother to Lady Hayter's, and expose my ignorance? Besides the etiquette of a ballroom would be Greek to me. I should not know what to do, or how to act. See what a burden I am Alec, a burden with a borrowed personality!"

"Darling, forgive me, but you are talking foolishly. Do you think for a moment I would leave you at home to-night? I will teach you to waltz this afternoon, you'll pick it up directly, and as to the etiquette of a ballroom, your wit will guide you. I have perfect confidence in my Myra."

Her face flushed with pride and pleasure.

"Do you really think you could show me the step to-day, when no one is looking?" she asked breathlessly, "and that I should not disgrace you to-night?"

"Don't be cruel dearest," he whispered. "You hurt me when you talk so."

Alec drew up at the door, gave in the parcel, and was turning to go, when Barbara ran out.

"Good morning," she cried, patting Olivette, and glancing up at Alec, "I see you have brought a parcel. I hope it isn't a present!"

She was a bright-eyed brunette with a very audacious smile, and the trimmest figure imaginable.

"Ungrateful girl!" laughed Alec, holding out his hand. "You ought to be very glad. It is as well to collect a few trinkets when you come of age."

"Come of age!" she cried indignantly. "Alec! what a horrid thing to say, when you know I am only 18."

"Well, 'coming out,' or something of that kind," he added vaguely.

"But people are too good," she declared deprecatingly. "I have done nothing but cut string and tear paper since I woke this morning. It is as bad as getting married."

"You have my deepest condolences," he replied, as she peeped up under her long lashes, with half veiled coquetry.

"Won't you come in?" she asked, addressing Miss Granville.

"No," replied Alec, as Myra shook her head. "We will wait until to-night, and greet you in all your *débutante's* glory."

"I have the loveliest bouquet," she cried, "an enormous shower of white flowers, with trails to the ground. I only hope I shan't trip over it."

"You will look like a bride."

"Yes," retorted Barbara, with an affected smile. "I always think a bouquet must be rather a comfort for a bride to yawn behind—such a fatiguing ceremony."

Alec gathered up his reins. He never could stand her when she tried to be funny.

"*Au revoir*," he cried, raising his hat, "till to-night."

"Take care you don't run over any stray illuminations," she said, waving her hand. "We are to have three thousand fairy lights down the avenue, and no end of Japanese lanterns."

"What do you think of Barbara?" he asked.

"Pretty," replied Myra.

And that was all they said.

That afternoon Myra slipped away with Alec, while in a far-off orangery he gave her a first dancing lesson.

Myra was light and willing, her husband persevering—most persistent. Before she realised the difficulty was surmounted she found herself spinning round and round among the palms.

"Let us try once again,' she said, trembling with excitement. "Hurrah!" as he guided her across the stone-flagged floor, "I *can* do it, Alec!—I can dance!—hurrah!"

Her childish glee delighted him.

"You must not tire yourself out before to-night," he replied. "Reserve your energies, and win fresh laurels by looking your very best. You will wear the little necklace I gave you?"

"I have been almost afraid to lift it yet from its velvet resting-place; but this evening it shall glisten round my throat. Every day I open the case, and watch the diamonds sparkling like dew in the early sunlight. There will be more than one *débutante* at Lady Hayter's to-night."

Mrs. Gordon felt justly proud of her guest.

"What a charming gown," she murmured, looking her over after dinner; "and your necklace, too, how lovely! Was it your mother's, my dear?"

"No," replied Myra, biting her lips.

"How exquisite the garden looks!" said Mrs. Gordon, as they filed up the brilliantly illuminated drive, in full view of Lady Hayter's residence.

"It is a palace of light!" cried Myra enthusiastically.

Barbara stood by her mother receiving the guests, and Myra fancied as she took her hand that the girl's eyes were not quite kind. They only softened when they turned to Alec.

But a moment later he had passed on, still keeping close to the lovely Miss Granville.

"I will get you a programme, dear," he said.

"Is it a concert, then?" she innocently asked.

He gave a little start, realising the danger of the unsophisticated remark.

"No, no, a list of the dances—a card for your partner's names," handing her one as she spoke.

"May I say I can't dance the polka?" she whispered.

"No, pretend you don't care to, and for Heaven's sake do not attempt the *Pas de quatre* or Lancers!"

"If our secret were known," he whispered, as they moved away together, "I could not dance with you the whole evening as I intend, if you will let me."

"Why not?"

"Husbands don't as a rule monopolise their wives in public."

"I have several names already on my programme, though they are quite illegible. I really don't know how I shall find the gentlemen again!"

A chill feeling of alarm crept over Alec.

"You do not have to find them, they come for you," he explained, staggered by her remark. "Come, let us imagine we are in our orangery; you remember the step?"

"Don't speak to me, or you will put me out. Oh! Alec, you don't think my other partners will *talk* while we are dancing?"

"Most probably!"

He led her to the polished floor.

"Oh! it is so slippery," she whispered; "I know I shall fall!"

He swayed her gently round to the Blue Hungarian Band. But, alas! for Myra's memory, dancing with Alec at home was very different to recalling the step in the excitement and bewilderment of a crowded ballroom. Hot tears of mortification rose to her eyes, but she forced them back, as he guided her tenderly to the wall.

"I can't do it, Alec," she sighed. "It was all very well by ourselves, but here I get dismayed directly, and forget the step. I wish that I hadn't come. Oh, dear! What shall I do?"

"Would you like to try once again, darling?" he whispered, grieved for her disappointment.

"Not for all the world. I never felt so dreadful in my life. What excuse can I make for not dancing?"

She clasped her hands over her fan, turning to him with troubled eyes.

"I don't know. How about a strained ankle—quite a slight strain, but painful when you dance?"

"Always untruths!" she murmured bitterly. "My path is scattered with them, such ugly black things! They are my fate, I suppose, and cannot be helped. As ye sow ——"

"Hush, dearest!" for Myra's voice was distinct and clear. "Take care what you are saying."

"May we go and sit down, or is it unusual while the dancing continues?"

"Of course not!"

He led her to a secluded spot, where they could be at peace.

"I don't see why you shouldn't enjoy the evening yet," he said. "We can sit out our dances, for the room is so crowded no one will notice whether we dance or not, and you can make some excuse to your other partners. I am afraid, dearest, I must leave you for my dance with Barbara. I had to ask her, but you will be all right if I take you back to my mother."

"Oh! yes."

No sooner had Alec left Myra than a *blasé* youth, with a fair moustache, sought her out, and declared it was his dance.

"I am sorry," she replied, "but I have strained my ankle—very slightly—which prevents my dancing. I hope you don't mind?"

"Oh! no; we can sit it out," he replied. "I have got a tennis wrist, so we are fellow sufferers in misfortune. I hate dancing. It's an awful bore!"

The girl looked at him with an amused smile.

"Then why do you come?" she asked.

"Well, you see, the Hayter's always invite me to Scotland for the shooting, so I must do the civil."

"How strange," said Myra, "to have so much pleasure and not enjoy it."

"Did you come with Mrs. Gordon?" he asked.

"Yes. I am staying at Saxbury Cross."

"Have you known them long?"

"No, only lately. I like Mrs. Gordon very much!"

"Yes, a wonderfully smart woman; and young Gordon, too, he's a right sort of chap. This little place has its topics of gossip, Miss Granville, and he is generally associated with our hostess's pretty daughter, Barbara. They say," with a lowering of his voice, "that there is likely to be a match in that quarter."

"Really!"

"Yes. He is with her now. Miss Hayter is the best dancer in the room."

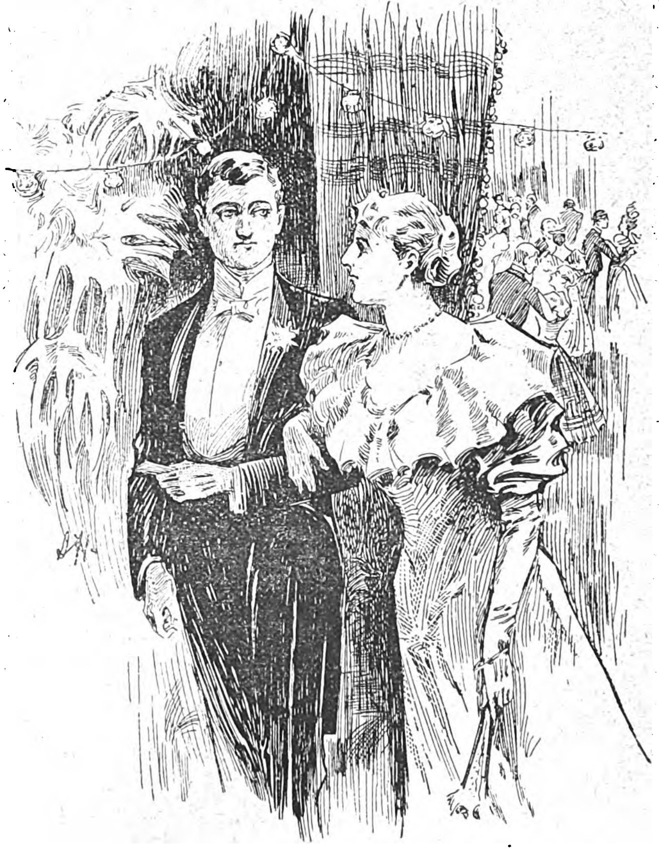
"Does she care for Alec Gordon?" asked Myra.

"Oh, yes, it is well known, and Lady Hayter has set her heart on old Shield's heir."

"You seem well acquainted with their family affairs."

"Well, one hears of these matters in various ways; not that I pay much attention to them. But the Hayters and Gordons are old friends, and some think the engagement is already *un fait accompli!*"

Myra resented her partner's gossip. She disliked hearing Alec coupled with another woman. Besides, had not this man called Barbara "the best dancer in the room," while she could not attempt a step without feeling hopelessly at sea? It was galling to an extreme!



He led her to a secluded spot.

"For myself," he continued, "I do not admire Miss Hayter. She isn't my style. I like fair hair and light colouring, don't you know? That gipsy beauty does not appeal to me. Then she is so terribly all there—you can't deceive her; it's quite annoying."

"Why should you wish to?" asked Myra.

"You are so literal, Miss Granville. I was speaking metaphorically."

"I should think," said Myra slowly, looking him up and down, "that you very possibly do a great deal of harm in the world. All that silly idle gossip, which concerns no one, is likely to cause unintentional injury. I hate to hear people's names linked together for the sake of diversion. Miss Hayter is not a friend of mine, but as a woman it is my duty to defend her against the tongues of men!"

Myra took everything seriously, and the light chatter she met with in Society nonplussed her.

The youth with the light moustache gazed in amazement at his fair judge.

"By Jove! you're rather hard on a fellow."

"Do you think so?" said Myra. "I meant to put it politely."

"Are you so appallingly virtuous yourself that you never talk a little scandal?"

"Virtuous!" she laughed. "Oh, no; I am very wicked. I don't wish to be, but the stream leads me on. The river of life is deep, you know, and I was never a good swimmer. The current carries me down."

"Then forgive my chatter *re* Miss Hayter and your friend Alec Gordon. I am afraid I put my foot in it!"

"Put his foot in it!" thought Myra; "what could he mean? Had she betrayed her love for Alec to a stranger?" The idea was horrible.

"I wish you would fetch my fan," she said, changing the subject. "I left it on the sofa by Mrs. Gordon. I feel so hot."

"Certainly, with pleasure," springing to his feet.

She watched him go with a sense of relief.

Voices behind her attracted Myra's attention.

"You won't give me up because I am 'out'?" a pleading voice was murmuring, so closely hidden beneath the palm that Myra could catch its faintest whisper. "You know, Alec, we have always been good comrades, and if I do flirt occasionally with other people, it is only because I see so little of my platonic friend!"

"I like you to flirt," he answered. "It keeps you happy and light-hearted."

"What a *gauche* remark!" replied the girl, "if you had any sense you would be angry. A jealous man is the only true flatterer."

It never seemed to dawn on the speaker's intelligence that Alec Gordon had no wish to flatter her.

"I know why you are so stupid to-night," she continued, with a sigh. "I have offended you."

"How?"

"Oh! don't pretend not to know! It was the word 'platonic.' You did not like my putting our friendship under that category."

"On the contrary, Barbara, it is the only category it can come under, and I dare say you find me intolerably dull, because men in love generally are."

"In love!" cried the girl's voice, "you in love!"

"Yes."

"Who with?" she asked sharply.

"You will know some day, but at present she must be nameless. I care for her more than all the world. Won't you wish me luck?"

There was a pause.

"I suppose you have not asked her yet?"

"Well, and what then?"

"She may not like you —in fact I know she will not like you, unless you are more amusing to her than you have been to me to-night. Poor Alec! Has the fever taken you very badly? People tell me it is a malady which is always cured by a dose of matrimony."

She rose, and Myra held her breath at the rustling of the satin skirt. "Don't forget to invite your platonic friend to the ceremony," said Barbara, with a mocking laugh, "and make Mrs. Gordon give a dance for your return. I can't exist without dancing after to-night."

Myra's cheeks were burning, for she had longed to move, but dare not, knowing her partner might return at any moment. She had listened against her will, and was thankful to see the fair-haired youth elbowing through the crowd.

"I had a tremendous hunt for the fan," he said, holding it aloft. "You left it in quite a different place. However, I ferreted it out at last, and here it is, none the worse for having been sat upon by a dowager weighing sixteen stone."

Myra took it from him with a grateful smile.

"It was so good of you," she said.

They went back to the ballroom together, and Alec was waiting for her in the doorway.

"Now, my darling," he whispered. "I can devote myself to you for the rest of the evening. I have toiled through my duty dance with Barbara!"

"And been catechised accordingly," she answered, explaining her unintentional eavesdropping.

They wandered away together into the palmhouse, and the remaining hours were spent in Elysium.

"Well, what did you think of Lady Hayter's ball?" asked Mrs. Gordon, as the carriage whirled them away.

"It was quite the nicest of all my experiences," replied Myra, leaning back on the cushions with a sigh of content.

CHAPTER VII.

LE JEU VAUT-IL DONC LA CHANDELLE?

A PERFECT tribe of cousins descended on the Gordon's one wet Saturday afternoon. They had come to boat, but the elements made any outdoor pastime impossible.

"Here we are, and you've got to amuse us," declared the youngest girl, Penelope's contemporary.

"What shall we do?"

They had gathered round the window in a group.

"Play billiards," suggested one.

"No. Ellaline always cuts the cloth, and the boys play too well to make a game."

"Can't *you* think of something, Miss Granville? Sing us a song."

"I don't sing."

"Then play."

"I—I haven't brought my music," blushing violently.

"Can nobody do anything?" sighed Penelope, contemplating the dismal sky. "Ah! here is the afternoon post, and a letter for you, Miss Granville."

Myra glanced at the writing hurriedly, and hid it away in her pocket.

"Do read your letter," continued Penelope. "There may be something amusing in it, or something dreadful, you never know, or it might need answering directly."

Myra drew out the common envelope reluctantly, with its dog's-eared corners, and sprawling uneducated hand.

The others were talking, and did not observe the sudden change in her face, as she scanned her father's epistle.

For a moment Myra sat dazed and stupefied, then turned in her hour of need to Alec, but he was talking, and she could not attract his attention.

"What shall I do?" she asked herself. "Goodness gracious! what shall I do?"

A sudden inspiration came to her. She glanced at the clock, and saw there was yet time.

"You asked me to suggest something amusing," she began with forced cheerfulness. "Now, I have a brilliant idea! Let us act a charade in the Theatre Royal back drawing-room."

"Oh! I say, Miss Granville, draw it mild," said Alec languidly, barely suppressing a yawn. "Why propose anything so terrible?"

"Don't be lazy," she replied, "or we shall put you in the audience."

"What a horrible threat!"

"Perhaps you did not know amateur acting was my forte? I simply adore it."

"I certainly never heard you mention the fact before."

While he was speaking Myra succeeded in edging to his side.

"Back me up," she whispered, slipping the letter into his hand, "or we are lost!"

He glanced at it swiftly.

"How can you save yourself?" he asked, under cover of conversation.

"By the charade," she replied, "only help me."

In a moment Alec took the cue from her.

"It really would be *rather* fun," he said. "Come along, girls, and let us think of a word. What would you suggest, Miss Granville?"

"Domestic. I will take the *rôle* of a comic servant, and get Sladen to lend me a cap and gown. It will be quite a becoming get-up. I always admire her aprons."

They rushed off to prepare, Myra discussing the dialogue as she attired herself in Sladen's clothes.

Just as the scene was set, and Penelope dressed as a cook, appeared with the dough for the first syllable, Myra declared she had turned suddenly faint.

"Please don't say anything about it," she whispered confidentially to Ellaline, the eldest cousin. "I shall be all right in a minute. I often feel like this. If you will go on with the charade I'll wait by that open window in the hall."

Ellaline, accustomed to dizziness herself, supported Myra to a chair, and undertook the stage management in her place.

Alec's wife, having counselled him to keep the charade going as long as possible, directly the hall was empty, slipped out of the house, and ran hastily down the drive. Once or twice she glanced fearfully behind her, then hurried on under the protecting shade of the trees.

At last she reached a gate leading to the road. A sigh of relief escaped her, though her heart was still troubled and sore afraid. What if it all ended in failure—total, abject, miserable?

What if the harvest of her scheming were one of ashes and despair?

Presently a well-known figure appeared in the distance, tramping stolidly through the mud. In a moment all sign of agitation left Myra. Acting in real life had become her second nature.

As Joseph Grey approached he caught sight of the slender figure in its spotless apron and black skirt. His daughter's eyes were brimful of welcome.

"Father!" she exclaimed, flinging her arms round his neck, "father!"

There was something hysterical in the cry.

"I couldn't 'elp coming, my girl," he said, "just to see 'ow you was gettin' along, as I was on some farmin' business near here. Marian thought I ought to come straight back, as you'd only been gone a few days; but there, I didn't know I should have missed you so much. Well, now, and it's a fine old place you're at," looking up the avenue. "Are you happy, lass?"

"Oh! yes, father, *so* happy!" with a radiant smile.

"I nearly didn't tell you to expect me, but Marian said surprises was bad for young girls, and sort of unsettled 'em."

"I am thankful you let me know," declared Myra, truly grateful to Aunt Marian. "It would have been as much as my place was worth if you had come up to the house. As it is I slipped out without anyone being the wiser. Mrs. Gordon is so particular, she won't allow us to see a creature. I am sorry I can't ask you in to tea, but I dare not, father!"

There was such a ring of real terror in her voice that Joseph Grey started.

"I say, Myra, they ain't unkind to you?"

"No, no; I could not be more comfortable, but I must respect the rules and regulations of the establishment. Here is a little something I don't want out of my savings, father. Go and get a thorough good meal at the 'Red Lion,' and it will cover your ticket, too."

As she spoke she slipped some gold coins into his hand.

Her father looked at them bewildered.

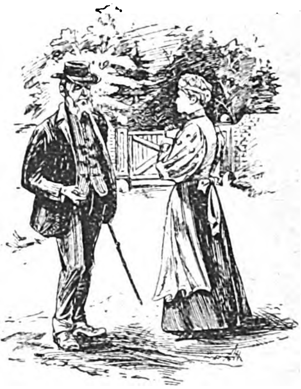
"I can't take it, lass," he said; "I can't really. It would be robbery!"

"To please me," she intreated, kissing him again, and trembling at the sound of footsteps. "I hear the gardener coming, and if he sees me with a strange man my character will be gone! Good-bye," refusing the money he tried to force back on her. "Take care of yourself, dear, and give my love to Aunt Marian."

With these parting words she flitted away, leaving him standing alone, staring after her, in the road.

Oh! what terrible shame and exposure she had escaped. Her heart stopped beating at the very thought.

As she regained the house Alec opened the door, meeting her with an anxious inquiry.



"I say, Myra, they ain't unkind to you?"

"I have saved you; I have saved myself," she said exultantly.

He drew a long, deep breath.

"Have you seen your father?"

"Yes, and this get-up was a perfect blind," she said, pointing to her cap and apron. "Oh! Alec, what a near shave we have had."

The soft summer rain ceased, and a stray sunbeam fell from the grey sky.

The others, having finished the charade, came out to breathe the damp-scented air.

"It was too cruel of you to desert us and sheer off at the crucial point, Miss Granville," said one of the boys.

"I am so sorry, but I did not feel well, and was obliged to go out."

"Are you better?" asked Ellaline.

"Oh, yes, thank you. How did the charade go?"

"Splendidly, and Mr. Shields was perfectly delighted. He said he hadn't laughed so much for a year, only he wanted to go and look for you in the middle. However, we persuaded him not."

"A thousand thanks! I really think if Mr. Shields had followed me I should have fainted right away."

When Alec and Myra were again alone she gave him a dramatic description of her trying situation.

"I nearly died," she said, "when I read his letter, and knew he would be asking for me at the back door in less than half an hour. I realised at last on what a precipice we are tottering. Think of the hourly dangers, and the certain mortification in store for us. Because for the moment our position is safe and unsullied we lose all fear of that crushing humiliation."

They were far away from Saxbury Cross in the distant woods, so like those of Ligeia Abbey that Myra yearned for their safety and protection.

She came close to her husband and put her arms round his neck.

"My darling," he murmured; "I know how you must suffer. I regret for your sake sometimes that I ever came into your life."

"No, no, Alec," she gasped. "See how you have raised me; remember our love, and never, never let me hear you say such things again."

There was silence for a moment.

"Keep our secret a little longer," Alec pleaded—"just a little longer, till we feel quite sure of Uncle Julian. Then we will reveal our true position and face the whole world. Can you not endure this for me—my wife?"

He whispered the words very tenderly.

"I don't think you understand how terrible it is," she replied. "I came here on approbation, with the distinct promise that you would tell your mother the real state of the case directly I had won her friendship and regard. I have tried my best, and to-day was a climax. I can't help loving my father, for he has always been good to me. Can you not imagine the pain of meeting him with a tissue of lies on my lips? Besides, every hour I am here is a risk. Any day your mother may write and mention my name to Mrs. Lysaght."

"They never correspond," said Alec. "Mrs. Lysaght's fingers are paralysed, and she doesn't care for letters. I don't suppose my mother writes to her once in a year."

For a moment Myra felt almost angry with her husband.

"But the 'once' might come to-morrow, to-night—this minute," she cried, working herself into a fever of apprehension. "I am like a French criminal who knows not the moment of execution. Sometimes I lock my door, shut my ears, and bury my face in the pillows, to repress the awful forebodings that possess me. Then a kind of stupefaction, a mental inactivity seizes me, and the weight of something heavy seems to dull my faculties. Every spring of action relaxes, and my feelings are deadened for the time. I take little interest in anything, and yet I am not at ease. I am never at peace! The conviction of my own wrong-doing presses heavier after each fresh struggle. I parry questions at every turn, all my principles are slipping away. I am becoming demoralised by this life of shame. Because I school myself to appear happy, you fancy my conscience is dead. But I have not such an elastic will as you imagine."

Her tone was so expressive of a soul overflowing with repentance, and chaffing against gross deceit, that Alec's remorse burst forth in a flow of self-condemnation.

"I am chiefly to blame," she said, breaking in, eager to defend him and convict herself. "I know how difficult it is for you—it is difficult for us both. When first I came to Saxbury Cross I threw a false short-lived lustre over my surroundings. I tried to forget that artifice, plotting, and hypocrisy are crimes, for which some day I shall be punished, as I deserve."

"God forbid!" ejaculated Alec. "There is nothing in your nature but what is pure and good. You have a perfect right to mould your life as you please."

"Yes, and that is why I want to confess, instead of hiding the truth. If it is not wrong, it must be right. The present is dangerous, Alec. Madman's play. We are like foolish children, wandering blindly through a mist—dreamers, castle-builders! I never could believe that 'all things come to him who waits.' It is an idle saying. Evil may come, I grant you, but little else in our case. I want to lead a noble life, and the present is ignoble!"

There were tears in Myra's voice. She was devoured by a secret restlessness, and all her nature's energies were rising in revolt. Her imagination was stirred by prospects of the uncertain and boundless future, the hope of a vast and undefined good, to sweep out this chapter of sin. She longed to form her being to something pure, beautiful, divine! To establish an empire over herself.

Alec could not speak for a moment; a lump in his throat seemed choking him. Then he pulled himself together and made a resolution.

"I will tell my mother—I will tell Uncle Julian," he said, "at the end of the week. There is small chance of discovery in so short a time. I want my mother to know you a little longer, since she never relies on first impressions, and dislikes forming hurried opinions. Are you willing to wait till then?"

"Who can tell what a day may bring forth?" she mused reluctantly.

"Darling," he whispered, "for my sake."

"When you say that, I can refuse you nothing," she declared, melting like wax beneath a flame under Alec's passionate gaze.

"Then let it be," said her husband gently.

Myra laid her hand in his.

"Till the end of the week," she replied.

CHAPTER VIII.

Who hath not Lost a Friend?

Julian Shields was seated in a low garden chair, with Satan at his feet, and a book he was not reading on his knees.

Every now and again he glanced anxiously towards the house, as though expecting someone.

Presently Myra crossed the lawn, and as she approached he drew another chair to his side.

"This is for you," he said, arranging the cushions. "I have been waiting so impatiently ever since you promised to come."

"But you knew I would keep my word?"

"Yes," speaking seriously. "I knew."

A slight misgiving crept into Myra's heart. Something in his tone filled her with secret vexation. Surely he would not overstep the paternal ground on which their friendship was based? Then she remembered his hurried kiss and evident confusion. His presence became suddenly irksome to her.

"What a splendid colour you have!" he said, looking at her blooming cheeks through his glasses.

"It is the country air," she replied, endeavouring not to appear self-conscious.

"Do you like it better than the unwholesome atmosphere of London?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I have such a lovely country home, Miss Granville—a perfect paradise, but lonely—very lonely for one old man."

"Why did you never marry?" asked Myra, eager to gain his confidence.

Julian Shields bent down, and stroked his dog's head.

"Because the right woman wouldn't have me," he replied. "There was only one, and she died years ago."

"Tell me about her," said the girl.

"I never thoroughly understood her nature," declared Julian Shields, "until her death. I think I grasped it then. I believe I know it now. When I first saw her she seemed barely more than a child. A little fair-haired creature, brimming over with high spirits. I can picture her to this day in a simple dress of white muslin, with light curls clustering on her forehead. I was nearly forty at the time, and it amazed me to find untold depths beneath her apparent frivolity. From the first moment we met, she singled me out to be the recipient of her deepest thoughts and feelings, her confidant and counsellor. She kept my letters and re-read them frequently, cherished my flowers, sought my companionship, sorrowed at my absence.

"What conclusion could I draw from this, but that she cared for me? and I was right. She loved, but not with the love common to women. When I asked her to be my wife, she raised her eyes unflinchingly to mine, and said: "No," deliberately, relentlessly! I had become so entirely one with her, that I could not imagine the future alone. Separation was impossible, she had grown to be part of my being.

"I sat stunned while she repeated the cruel words of refusal, with her cool hand resting in mine. Then reading the terrible sorrow in my face, the flood gates of regret opened suddenly. She buried her face in her hands and wept, for she knew what she had done. Yet next to her own kith and kin, I was nearer to her than anyone on earth."

"Then why," broke in Myra, "did she treat you so?"

"That is the mystery," he replied, "which years of mutual intercourse gradually unveiled. She loved no other, but she loved me as a friend, and in the bonds of friendship only were our hearts united. That union of souls never broke or tottered. By degrees the soothing influence of her theory healed my sorrow, and cured the wound."

"Then you never tried to forget her?"

"No. Why should I? She was my life—my very self. Without me her days would have been as meaningless and empty as mine without her. Our mutual sympathy, judgment, and companionship were necessary to our separate existences. You cannot have known a friend, or you would not speak of forgetfulness. In connection with friendship there is no such word. It is something less than passion, and greater than love; but" (a little impatiently) "I see you do not understand."

Myra gazed across the river with half-closed eyes.

"Yes," she said at last, "I see it; but it takes time to learn—time to know."

"And then," he faltered, "she died—died with my name on her lips. 'You have been the salvation of my life,' she said to me. 'God bless you as only good and loyal hearts are blessed.'"

"She must have differed widely from all the rest," declared Myra, stretching out her arms, as though to embrace the whole race of women. "On the surface she was wilful—selfish—a flirt; but deep waters ran strong and clear below."

"She was an angel!" cried Julian Shields. "But," with a critical glance at Myra, "you speak as if you had known and studied her."

"I saw her through your eyes," she replied.

He bent forward and captured Miss Granville's hand.

"You are the only living creature who has ever won a confidence from me. It would have been sacrilege to speak of her to another."

His voice trembled with emotion, and a tear fell upon Myra's fingers.

"Do you know why I told you?" he asked eagerly. "Many a year has passed since she left me; why did I speak of her to-day?"

"How can I tell?" said Myra, drawing away her hand. "Perhaps you guessed that I have a keen insight into character?"

"No; not that. I thought I ought to. I know I am an old man—grey, wrinkled, wasted——"

Myra could not contradict him, as she looked at the limp, sunken figure in the chair.

"Yet if," he continued, "one so young and beautiful could deign to look at me without aversion, there is a loving heart and a stately home waiting for you. Myra!—Myra! you won't spurn them?—you won't spurn them?"

His voice rose to a wail.

She looked up sadly. The last shred of her past individuality seemed to fall with the scattered daisy petals she was destroying with nervous fingers.

"Be loyal to the dead," she said firmly, clearly. "Live for memory's sake; is it not enough? You loved her then—love her still!"

"How cold and comfortless," he retorted, "to live for what has no being, and is hidden in the ground. Could you not care a little, Myra? I would give you anything—everything!"

"I can't! I can't! Don't speak of it again," she cried.

Myra's whole nature rose in revolt; how could he think she would sell herself to him?

When next he spoke, her resentment vanished.

"Forgive me, my dear," he muttered feebly, "and forget that I ever dreamt of such a thing. I was presumptuous, mad!"

"Oh! no, please do not imagine I am angry," she replied. "You have paid me the highest possible compliment, and I thank you."

Myra spoke simply, but sincerely.

"How very good you are," he said gratefully. "But may I ask one question? Do you love another?"

Myra's face flushed and paled in turn.

"Would you blame me if I did?"

"No, indeed. Why should I? It is only natural!"

"You confided in me," she whispered. "May I confide in you?"

He drew his chair closer.

"As you please," he answered. "I am your humble servant for life!"

"You won't betray my secret?" Myra's voice shook, and she framed the words with difficulty. "But I love your nephew, Alec."

He started involuntarily.

"If you cannot care for me," said Julian Shields, concealing his emotion, "there is no one I would rather see you marry. Does Alec know his good fortune?"

Before she could answer, their conversation was interrupted by Mrs. Gordon, who joined them with Alec and Penelope.

"I am sure Miss Granville would like to go on the river," said the old man, with a benevolent glance at his nephew. "Take her, Alec, my boy. I am too gouty and decrepid for your light boats."

Myra gave him a grateful look while Alec helped her into the canoe.

Julian waved his handkerchief as they paddled away, watching them lingeringly. Then he turned to Mrs. Gordon.

"We must give the young people a chance, Alethea," he said, with assumed levity. "A charming girl, Miss Granville, and the very wife for Alec."

CHAPTER IX.

Treading the Wine-Press.

"What are you reading, my dear?" asked Mrs. Gordon, finding Myra deep in a book.

"A most interesting history," she replied with glowing cheeks, "of a man self-taught, self-informed. He was born in narrow circumstances, and rose, of course, or his life, with its struggles, sorrows, and retrenchments would never have been written."

Mrs. Gordon glanced at the title.

"Ah, yes," she replied; "it is one of Alec's. He made me read it when I was ill. He always gives me the very driest books to digest in bed."

"How cruel! But did you find this dry?"

"Unwholesome rather than actually dull—so many distasteful subjects are discussed. For instance, that chapter on the prejudices of caste and rank."

"Showing that a man may be worth more than his wardrobe or title. I have an intense admiration for anyone who can rise from a low estate."

"The hero was a perfect barbarian in early life," said Mrs. Gordon.

"That is the delightful part of the book, for, though he sought to be great, it was not the glare of outward distinction that attracted him."

"You read a great deal?"

"Yes."

"Ah, how you would delight in Mrs. Lysaght's secluded library at Ligeia Abbey! I dare say you have often heard her speak of it, though she would not allow you a glimpse inside if you stayed there for a month. She believes her husband's spirit haunts the room. Once she told me that her maid distinctly heard footsteps when to her certain knowledge no one was within, since the door was locked and she had the key. The foolish woman was too frightened to look, and ran away with her apron over her head."

Myra broke into a peal of laughter.

"Was it in the morning?" she asked.

"Yes. You are evidently not superstitious."

"No. Isn't it funny that anybody should credit such nonsense?"

"I suppose," continued Mrs. Gordon, "you have never seen the Ligeia library?"

"Oh! yes, indeed I have."

"Really? You were singularly favoured, for Mrs. Lysaght is a perfect dog-in-the-manger over that room."

"It is a crime," declared Myra, "that no one should benefit by it. I am never quite sure about the tenth commandment when I think of those books. Mrs. Lysaght should write a warning text over the door: 'Take heed, and beware of covetousness!' I dreamt I saw it thrown open to the Eversley public, with the words: 'Soul, take thine ease!' inscribed above the shelves."

Mrs. Gordon took up her embroidery, and Myra watched her needle fly in and out with a certain fascination.

"I wonder," continued the girl, "if this present age is worse than the past? Does the world deteriorate, or improve?"

Mrs. Gordon stopped working to look at Myra.

"You are always thinking out something!" she said. "It is a way I have noticed young people fall into when they associate greatly with their elders. You are, I presume, frequently with your father—in fact, his chief companion."

"I have no mother, you see."

"Is he a very learned man—a bookworm? I often fancy he has brought you up to take a serious view of life, which makes you seem older than your years."

"Oh! no, you are quite mistaken. I began to 'think' when I was very young. I ought to have been a man. I should never have rested till I did something great for my country, but being a woman," with a sigh, "I am useless."

"Not at all. Influence is always helpful, if you exercise it rightly. I quite enjoy a talk with you, my dear, you are so unlike other girls. Does your father do anything in the way of business, or is he always with you?"

"He is always with me," said Myra. "He is old, and enjoys an inactive country life."

"Does he take much interest in politics?"

"No."

"I suppose you go about a great deal, and visit frequently?"

"I don't often leave him."

"Probably you have a great many friends at Eversley?"

"Yes, but it is a very quiet place."

"I don't know anyone there," said Mrs. Gordon, "except Mrs. Lysaght. By the way, I hear she has recovered her strength, moving about quite easily now. She tried some wonderful natural water from America, called Geneva water, which worked miracles, at least so I was informed by a mutual friend."

"She has been travelling abroad," said Myra.

"Really! I hardly ever see or hear from her now, except when Alec went to stay at Ligeia Abbey. She was very kind to him, and he quite enjoyed his visit. But I am disturbing you in your book."

"I have nearly finished it."

"And you agree with the sentiments?"

"Entirely."

"I grew weary of the endless comments on our imperfections. Undoubtedly eating, drinking, and "caste" are not to be despised, being essential. But to pretend that common people can rise socially to our level, and be received in our drawing-rooms, is absurd! They would jar dreadfully."

"Have you ever seen it attempted?"

"Never!"

"Then how can you tell? If the lowest were received from their youth by the upper classes, there might be no vulgar ill-bred men and women in the world."

Mrs. Gordon laughed outright.

"What a very funny idea!" she said.

"Everybody is so narrow," declared Myra, warming to her subject. "Society is a battlefield, where the spirit of discord breaks out in religion, politics, business and private life. Each man is seeking to snatch some prey from his neighbour, and to cast his brother in the sea. If we scrutinise it we find nothing but petty strife and hopeless sin. Some people can't help themselves, they are made to sin against their will by the force of circumstances, but the majority sin for the pure pleasure of it. Clever men and women write books to rob us of our God; weak men and women read them, and lose their faith."

"My dear girl," cried Mrs. Gordon, "you cannot possibly comprehend the universe! You can only reconcile yourself to facts, and think no more about them."

"I should be so happy if I could."

"I suppose we are all born under a curse," sighed Mrs. Gordon, "and the devil will be ever rampant in the world."

"If there was only one devil, it wouldn't matter so much," said Myra, smiling, "but there must be so many demons to do the harm. I sometimes wonder if there is any difference between a devil and a demon?"

"I expect they are pretty much the same."

"Perhaps a demon is a lower devil—a humanised devil—the sort that takes possession of men when they drive their higher selves out, when they throw aside control!"

Myra was silent for a moment, then she returned to the old subject.

"If I were a village girl with low born parents, would you consider me fit to be your guest?" she asked.

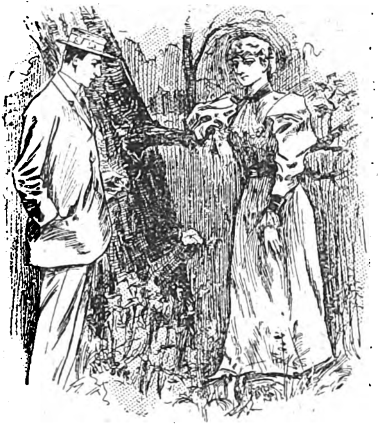
Mrs. Gordon looked into Myra's anxious eyes, and smiled indulgently.

"My dear, your hypothesis is impossible. Were it possible, I certainly should!" touching her hand caressingly. "I am very glad Alec met you at Eversley, and hope we shall see a great deal of each other."

"I should, indeed, love to have you for my friend—always," said Myra.

"You must prove your friendship by coming here frequently," declared Mrs. Gordon. "I shall be delighted to welcome you at any time."

As Myra talked to Mrs. Gordon, she resolved not to lie down again and take her rest until the secret burden had been lifted from her soul. She determined, though the week was not yet out, to force Alec to speak, or on some pretext to leave the house. Even mentioning Mrs. Lysaght to Mrs. Gordon had caused Myra pain, as she thought of the patroness on whose grounds she had lived, and in whose service her father was employed.



Myra leant against a low bough.

She contemplated her position with abhorrence. Had not she, Myra, pretended to this woman's friendship (which she did not really possess) as a garment of respectability, a weapon with which to break into Mrs. Gordon's family circle?

Every word she had spoken at Saxbury Cross, everything she had ever done, what did it amount to? Deceit and guilt!

Her own sense of judgment swelled the evidence against her.

Oh! the pity of it—the pity of it!

She cursed the fate that gave her humble parentage. What had she done after all to suffer the scorn of Mrs. Lysaght and her friends? Where lay her sin? The crime of being poor and lowly, and trying an unbeaten track, the unpardonable offence of flying in the face of conventionality, which must ever be held sacred. With a little gasp Myra rose and left the room.

"Does the road wind up hill all the way?" she asked pitifully, raising her face to Heaven as she went out into the fresh air.

"Yes, all the way. Resolution and perseverance may crumble the hard stones to dust, but unless the traveller climbs, he will grovel for ever below in the vale of mortality."

A terrible condemnation seemed to have fallen upon her shoulders.

"If you had stayed in your proper province," said conscience, "you would have escaped the grievous mortification of the coming confession, and been saved the wear and tear of aping good breeding, struggling with topics of discourse, courting contempt, falling into errors."

The follies of vanity, the delusions of self-conceit, the restlessness of ambition, and the torments of envy, crowded into her mind, but were hounded out and crushed by the undying power of love. None of these things had any right to taunt her. She married for love, lived for love, and would, if need be, suffer for its sake. Love, the over-ruling passion of her life, had led her into the trap blindly. Love had been to blame all along.

There was no making a choice between good and evil; she had been moved by impulse, driven by the torrent of an all-prevailing affection. That was her defence before all her enemies!

It was absurd to imagine she could strive against it. What woman was ever strong yet? No opposition, contention, or persuasion would have parted her from Alec.

Presently she found her husband, and confronted him with a startling assertion.

"The end is at hand," she said lightly.

"What do you mean?"

She smiled into his eyes, and her face looked radiant in the sunlight.

"You are going to free me to-day," she replied, a ring of calm determination in her tone. "I have tired and sickened of this play—this farce. It is not my nature, dear; I cannot keep it up. The deception shall not last an hour longer, if I can help it. Release me from bondage, or let me go away and hide myself from everybody. I have been talking to your mother, and I believe she likes me. I feel nerved for the fray. There must be a thunderstorm to clear the air."

Myra leant against a low bough, and picked off the bark, waiting for Alec to speak. As always exquisitely alive to outward creation, sounds, motions, and forms, she feasted her eyes on the natural beauty of the quiet river scene with a sigh of content.

"I am so glad I have decided," she said—"so thankful to have made up my mind."

For the first time Alec realised that his wife's will was stronger than his own, and he loved her all the better.

"You really wish it," he said, "this very day—this very hour?"

She bent her head in assent.

Alec gazed at Myra as on a superior being whom he was not worthy to touch. His own interests, plans, and advancement were all swallowed up in an entire and unreserved devotion to her.

A certain sense of triumph and exultation possessed him as he obeyed the first command she had ever made.

"Where is my mother?" he asked.

She pointed to the drawing-room windows. Myra's presence had thrown into circulation new and stirring thoughts as Alec took her hand and walked towards the house, feeling roused and fortified to well-doing. He could withstand trial, bear suffering, front danger, and resist scorn with this loving woman at his side.

She had imparted to him her deep, pure, ennobling instincts, and he would acknowledge her as his wife before the sun set.

CHAPTER X.

Le Jeu est Fait.

As Myra mounted the staircase leading from the garden to the balcony, touching the banisters lightly with trembling fingers, she dared not reveal her agitation.

Perhaps she was seeking Mrs. Gordon for the last time, and would vanish from Saxbury Cross like a shadow in the night, only to be remembered as an evil interloper who darkened its doors for a season.

Alec's mother was talking to someone as they entered—a visitor who turned and faced Myra with an astonished stare.

The girl neither started nor spoke, but stood petrified, her blood frozen in her veins, her throat parched and dry, and her eyes dimmed by a sudden mist.

"Mrs. Lysaght has just returned from abroad, and came to surprise me," said Mrs. Gordon pleasantly. "I need not introduce you."

The old lady put on her glasses and confronted Myra.

"What are you doing here?" she asked freezingly, "and in those clothes?"

The sound of her voice seemed to impart fresh powers of self-possession to the girl, who would formerly have quailed under Mrs. Lysaght's gaze.

"Is anything wrong with them?" she said, glancing down at her dress. Then with a friendly smile: "How do you do, Mrs. Lysaght; how are you?"

No answer.

Mrs. Lysaght drew away as though she had been stung.

"Miss Granville has been staying with us," vouchsafed Alec's mother, surprised at this new departure.

"*Staying with you!*" cried Mrs. Lysaght vehemently. "My dear Alethea are you mad?"

For a moment Mrs. Gordon doubted her senses, staring at her visitors with troubled eyes.

"Myra *Grey*," continued Mrs. Lysaght, emphasising the last word, "explain yourself. What terrible deception have you been practising? Can you deny that your name is Grey?"

"Yes," she replied, and her eyes dilated. "I do deny it. When you say I bear that name you speak falsely."

"In fact, I lie?" sneered the old lady.

"You are under a misapprehension," said Myra quietly.

Mrs. Lysaght quivered with indignation, and her face grew purple as she struggled to regain composure.

"Then who is this woman, Alec?" she burst out furiously, "if she is not one of my retainers, the daughter of the man at my lodge-gates, masquerading as a lady? I suppose that is how you amused yourself at Ligeia Abbey?"

"Mrs. Lysaght," he replied, "you are insulting my mother's guest. Mother, has there been anything in this lady's conduct to justify such remarks?"

"No," stammered Mrs. Gordon. "There must be some terrible mistake."

"Tut! tut! Don't I know my own servants?"

Alec's face grew dark and forbidding.

"She is neither your servant nor Myra Grey," he cried, livid with pent up fury. "She is Myra Gordon, and my wife!"

Mrs. Lysaght sank with a moan on her chair, while Mrs. Gordon stood motionless, like a woman turned to stone.

"It is true, then," she said at last, breaking that awful pause. "This girl is indeed what Mrs. Lysaght says, and you, Alec—you have *married* her?"

The bitter ring in the mother's voice pierced Myra's heart.

Involuntarily she started forward, her beautiful face drawn and haggard with sudden pain.

"Spare me!" she cried, "for pity's sake! I love him so."

"Love him!" broke in Mrs. Lysaght, "a scheming minx! You love his money and position, and to think this terrible calamity should have been perpetrated beneath my roof."

"Will you hear me; will you let me speak?" cried Myra.

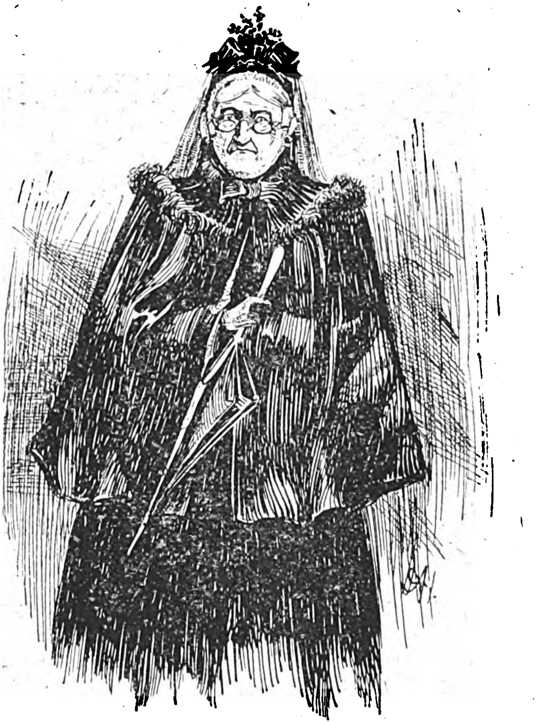
"You have no need to," declared Alec, gently taking her hand. "I can speak if anything has to be said. My wife shall explain nothing."

His wife—his wife before all the world! Oh! how her heart swelled with pride at the words.

He advanced towards his mother and tried to kiss her, but she drew away.

"Why have you deceived me?" she asked sternly.

"I will tell you. I wanted you to be perfectly unprejudiced, and meet Myra before malicious tongues could bias you against her. In becoming my wife she has made me the happiest and proudest man in England."



The old lady put on her glasses and confronted Myra.

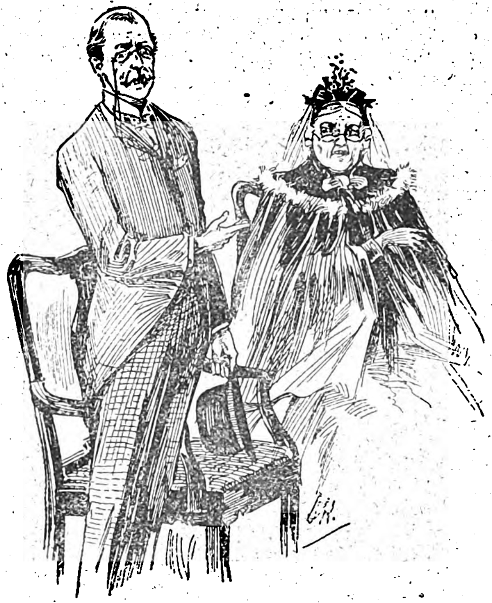
"And so he ought to be—so he ought to be!" cried a cackling voice in the balcony, while to the astonishment of everybody Julian Shields appeared, with his face wreathed in smiles. He gazed benignly upon the young couple, stretching out a hand to each.

"I have a confession to make," he said, "and you must not be shocked. I have been eaves-dropping."

A gasp of relief escaped Myra. She feared he had not heard all. Her hand tightened over his, and she edged nearer as a frightened child, with piteous, pleading eyes.

Julian Shields gave her a reassuring glance, and turned to Mrs. Lysaght. In a moment his face altered, he frowned ominously, while his voice quavered with suppressed indignation.

"I don't know who you are," he said, addressing the



"Take the serpent out of our Eden!" he said, pointing to the portly figure in the chair.

new-comer, "and I don't wish to. But if I were to say what I think of you, it is doubtful, very doubtful, whether Saxbury Cross would ever see your face again."

Then he turned to Alethea.

"Take the serpent out of our Eden!" he said, pointing to the portly figure in the chair.

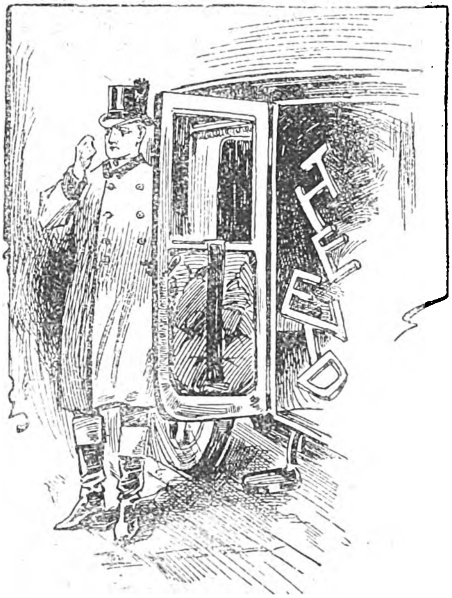
Mrs. Gordon touched her forehead as a significant sign to Mrs. Lysaght.

The latter raised her eyes sympathetically to the ceiling, and lent back on the cushions.

"As for you, Alethea," he continued, "at your time of life you ought to know better. You can be no sister of mine to treat a lady in this inhospitable and uncivil manner. Your duty as a mother and a hostess should have saved you from such a shameful breach of etiquette. I am sorry for you, very sorry, Alethea. Your lack of good breeding will not be forgotten. Your dear boy has no father to protect him against the snobbery of his female relations, but I am ready to take the place of that lost parent, if he and his wife will accept me as such."

Myra raised her face for the paternal salute he pressed on her brow.

"I know you have a perfect right to blame me for not confiding in you from the first," Alec said to Mrs. Gordon very gently. "I planned this visit for a purpose. I could not believe that after even a short acquaintance with Myra you would ever think ill of her. I have chosen her from all the world to love and to honour because I know she is the best and purest woman on earth. This very afternoon we decided to tell you, and were coming for that purpose when Mrs. Lysaght intervened."



Myra turned to the visitor when Alec had finished speaking.

"Have you anything to say against me?" she asked, "beyond the accident of birth? Can you mention one slur upon my character—one breath of slander? Do you deny that we are honest people?"

"Certainly not," retorted Mrs. Lysaght; "but you are no fit wife for Alec Gordon—a village girl, with a villager's education!"

Her words nerved Myra to plead still further with Mrs. Gordon.

"Have you forgotten the hypothesis which you called impossible?" she asked, with a deep ring of pathos in her tone. "Won't you recall your words now? Must I be cast out because God placed me in a lowly home and gave me humble parentage? I could not help loving your son—surely the very sight of him here before your eyes justifies that assertion? Then Mrs. Lysaght speaks of my 'village education' as another slight. Have you found me untaught—uncouth? If so, say it, and let me go—let me go!"

She repeated the words wildly, her eyes blazing with feverish light, and her hands outstretched.

"Pray do not be dramatic, I ask you," said Mrs. Lysaght scathingly.

But Mrs. Gordon's nature had been undergoing a change, while views so fresh and real sprang into her heart that she hardly appeared the same woman.

Myra's influence had enlarged her theories, widened her ideas, and brought scope to a narrow vision. She understood her son's human weakness, and noted the attractive sweetness of his girl-wife. Men love strongly, and she divined in Alec's look the intense suffering produced by her pride and resentment.

Her anger broke down suddenly, while she saw in a clearer light the full force of Myra's love and trust, and the impression her strong, consistent character had made upon her husband.

Mrs. Gordon no longer hardened her heart, but gradually moulded it into the image of divine forbearance and forgiveness. Even Mrs. Lysaght, in her exasperation, could bring no evil report to bear upon Alec's wife, and all the mother's ill-will and suspicion were dispelled.

Her face softened, the hard expression round her mouth relaxed, while her eyes glowed suddenly with pity, love, and pardon.

She walked slowly forward, and kissed Myra upon the lips.

"Do you sanction this disgraceful alliance?" burst forth Mrs. Lysaght fiercely.

Alethea bent her head.

"I do, most certainly," she answered firmly.

A ray of sunlight shone straight through the open window, and fell like a halo upon Myra's hair.

Mrs. Lysaght rose and re-entered her carriage

LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

No. 5.—The Bluff that Moved the Rival Dance Hall.

"Which I reckons," remarked the old cattleman, as he tilted his chair against the wall and began arranging a smoke; "which I now reckons this yere was the only catyclism in trade Wolfville suffers, the only time it comes to what you all Eastern sports would call a show-down in commerce.

"O' course, thar's the laundry war I mentions to you aforetime; but that's between females, an' don't count. Females—while it's no sorter doubt they're the noblest work o' their Redeemer — is nervous an' peculiar that away, an' due any time to let their hair down their backs, emit a screech, an' claw an' lay for each other just for luck. An' as I says, if you confines the festivities to the females engaged, an' prevents the men standin' in on the play, it shore winds up in sobs and forgiveness, an' tharfore don't count.

"As I says, what I now relates is the only real industrial trouble I recalls in Wolfville.

"I allers remembers it, because, bein' as how I knows the party who's the aggravatin' cause tharof, it mortifies me the way he jumps into camp and carries on.

"When I sees him first is ages before; when I freights with eight mules over the Old Fort Bascome trail from Vegas to the Panhandle. This sharp—which he's a tenderfoot at the time, but plumb wolf by nature—trails up to me in the Early Rose saloon an' allows he'd like to make a deal an' go projectin' over into the Panhandle country with me for a trip.

"I was campin' then on the Concha, an' the Colonel, who's allers out to try experiments an' new deals, puts it up he'll go down to the river an' take a swim. So he lines out for the water.

"Jerry's hangin' about camp—for he's sorter a pet mule—allowin' mebby I commits a ham-rind or some such delicacy to him to chew on; an' he hears the Colonel allow he'll swim some. So when the Colonel p'ints out for the Concha, Jerry sa'nters along after; figgerin' mighty likely how he'll pass the hour by watchin' the Colonel swim.

"I'm busy on flapjacks at the time—which flapjacks is shore good eatin'—an' I don't observe nuthin' to Jerry nor the Colonel neither.

"They're away half an hour when I overhears ejaculations of rage an' horror, though I can't make out no words. I don't have to get caught in no landslide to tumble to a game, an' I'm aware at once that Jerry an' the Colonel has got their destinies mixed.

"Of course I goes over to the field of strife, aimin' to save Jerry, or save the Colonel, whichever has the other down. When I bursts on the scene, the Colonel starts for me, splutterin' an' makin' noises an' p'ntin' at Jerry, who stands thar with an air of insolence. The Colonel's upper lip hangs down queer, like an ant-eater's, an' he can't talk no more. It's all mighty amazin'.

"'What's all this toomult about?' I says.

"The short of the riot is this: When the Colonel goes in for his swim he lays his false teeth that way on a stone. When he comes for his teeth, they're shorely gone, an' thar stands Jerry puttin' it on he's asleep. Them teeth is filed away in Jerry's stomach.

"Which the Colonel raves 'round frightful an' wants to kill Jerry an' amputate him in two an' look for the teeth. But I won't stand it. I'm going to need Jerry down further on the quicksand fords of the Canadian; an' as I explains, them teeth is a wreck by now, an' no good even if he gets 'em again; Jerry munchin' of his food powerful.

"After a while I rounds up the Colonel an' herds him back to camp. Jerry has shore sawed off a sore affliction on that tenderfoot when he takes in them teeth; I can see that. His lip hangs down like a blacksmith's apron, an' he can't talk a little bit; jest makes signs or motions like he's Injun or deaf.

"It's mebby two weeks later when Jerry gets another shot at the Colonel. It's the evenin' after the night Jerry sneaks into camp, soft foot as a coyote, an' noses open the grub box, an' eats up five bottles of whiskey; all we has.

"We're jest gone into camp, an' I've hobbled this Jerry mule an' his mate the other wheeler, an' is busy hobblin' my nigh swing-mule, when I hears trouble fomentin' between my tenderfoot an' Jerry.

"The fact is she's done fomented. This Colonel, bein' some heated about that whiskey an' plumb sore on Jerry on account of them teeth, allows to himse'f he'll jest nacherally take a trace-chain an' warp Jerry once or twice for luck.

"If this yere tenderfoot had a been free with me an' invited me into his confidence touchin' his designs, I'd took a lariat an' roped an' throwed Jerry for him, an' tied the felon down an' let the Colonel wallop him an hour or so. But the Colonel's full of variety that away, or mebby he thinks I'll side with Jerry; anyhow, he selects a trace-chain an' without sayin' a word dances all cautious towards his prey.

"Which this is relaxation for Jerry. While that Colonel tenderfoot is a rod away, Jerry turns his tail some sudden in that direction, an' then that he'pless shorthorn stops both heels some'ers up about the second button on his shirt.

"That settles it. The Colonel's an invalid immejit. I shorely has a time with him that night.

"The next day he can't walk; an' he can't ride in the waggon, 'cause of the jolts. It all touches my heart, an' at last I ups an' makes a hammock outen a Navajo blanket, which is good an' strong, an' sorter swings the Colonel to the reach of the trail-waggon.

"Where the trail's level the Colonel comes on all right; but now an' then when a wheel slumps into a rut, the Colonel can't help but smite the ground where he's the lowest, an' it all draws groans an' laments from him a heap.

"One time when his agony makes him groan speshul strong, I sees Jerry toss his head as if he enjoys it, an' mention somethin' in an exultant tone to his mate over the waggon-tongue. Of course, we're trottin' 'long the trail at the time, an' bein' he's the nigh—which is the saddle-mule of a team—I'm riding Jerry's comrade. So when I notes how Jerry is that joyous about it, I reaches across an' belts him some abrupt in between the y'ears with the butt of a shot-filled blacksnake; an' it sorter lets the whey outen Jerry's delight, an' he doesn't get so much bliss outen that tenderfoot's misfortune as he did.

"It goes along all right until I swings down to the crossing of the Canadian. It's about fourth drink-time in the afternoon, an' I'm 'llowing to cross the Canadian that evenin' an' camp on t'other side.

"The river is high an' rapid from rains some'ers back on its headquarters, an' it's wide an' ugly. It ain't more'n four foot deep, but the bottom is quicksand, an' that false. If I let's my waggons stop ten seconds anywhere between bank an' bank, I'm going to be shy the waggons at the close. I'll be dead lucky if I win out with the mules. It was a hard, swift crossin'.

"I swings down to the river's aige with my mind filled up about the rush I've got to make. It's go through on the run or bog down.

"First, I settles down in my saddle, an' then I pours the whip into the two leaders, and starts the whole eight into the water on the jump. The river is running like a scared wolf, an' the little lead mules hardly touches bottom.

"Jest as the trail waggon takes the water, an' as the two leaders is plumb into the y'ears a howl developes behind me. It's my poor tenderfoot in his hammock under the trail waggon. He shrieks as the water catches him, an' it all hits me like a bullet, for I plumb overlooks him, thinkin' of that quicksand crossin'.

"It's shore too late now, I'm in an' I can't stop. To make things more complex, jest as the water cuts off the tenderfoot's yell like puffin' out of a candle, a little black mule, which is my off pointer, loses his feet and goes down. I pours the leather into the team the harder; an' the others go into their collars an' drags my black pointer with them; only he's under water. O' course, I 'llows both the black pointer an' the Colonel's gone for good, an' shorely due to drown'd a whole lot.

"We gets out, the seven other mules an' me with the waggons, an' the second he's staked out on the sand on his side, the drown'd mule gets up an' sings as triumphant as I ever hears. Swimmin' under the river don't bother him a bit.

"Then I looks for the Colonel under the trail waggon, but he's vanished complete. Nacherally, I takes him for a dead an' gone man; an' figgers if some eddy or current don't get him; or he don't go aground on no sand bar, his fellow men will fish him out som'ers between me an' New Orleans, an' hold service over him an' plant him.

"Bein' as I can't be of no use where it's a clean sweep play like this, I dismisses the poor tenderfoot from my mind; an' after hobblin' an' throwin' loose my team, lugs out the grub box an' goes into camp.

"Which I should allers have played that tenderfoot for dead, if it ain't that years later he one day comes wanderin' into Wolfville. He ain't no tenderfoot now; he's as hard as a moss agate, an' about as worthless.

"I renoos my acquaintance with him, an' he onfolds how he gets outen the Canadian that day; but beyond that we takes a drink or two at the same time, I sorter passes him up. Thar's a heap about him I don't take to.

"He lays around Wolfville, mebby it's a week, sorter peerin' an' spyin' about. He says he's lookin' for 'an openin'.' An' I reckon he is, for at the end of a week he slaps up a joint outen tent cloth an' fence boards an' opens a dance hall squar ag'inst the one which is already thar.

"This yere alone is likely to brood an' hatch trouble; but as if takin' a straight header into Hamilton's game ain't enough—this yere Jim Hamilton is the man who has the dance hall in Wolfville previous—this Colonel of mine don't get no pianer; nor round up no music of his own; but stands in an' pulls off reels, an' quadrilles, an' greencorn dances to Hamilton's music goin' on next door.

"I was through the Lincoln county war, an' has pervaded the frontier for years; but I never tracks up on no sech outrage in my life, as this yere disgraceful Colonel openin' a hurdy-gurdy right agin Hamilton's, an' then stealin' his music an' dancin' tharunto.

"It is the second night, an' Hamilton concloodes he'll see about it some. He comes in to the Colonel's new joint all ca'm an' considerate, an' gives it out thar's goin' to be trouble if the Colonel don't close up his game or bring on his own fiddlers.

"'An' if you all don't close your game or hunt out your own music,' said Hamilton, 'I'll mighty shore to get my six-shooter an' close it for you.'

"'See yere,' says my Colonel—which he's sure been learnin' since I parts with him on the Canadian—'the first hold-up who comes foolin' round to break up a baile of mine, I'll bend a gun over his head. What business you got fillin' up my place of business with your melodies? You jest rolls your tunes in yere like you owns the ranch, an' then comes curvin' in an' talks of a gun play because instead of layin' for you for that you disturbs my peace with them harmonies, I'm that good-natured I yields the p'int an' dances to 'em. Now you pull your freight,' says the Colonel, 'or I'll fill you full of lead.'

"This argument of the Colonel dazzles Hamilton to that extent he don't know whether he's got the high hand or no. He thinks a minute an' then p'ints over to the Red Light lookin' for Enright and Doc. Peets. Jest as he leaves the rival dance hall, the Colonel, who's callin' off his dances, turns to the quadrille, which is pausin', pendin' the dispoote, an' shouts:

"'You bet I knows my business. Right hand to your pardner; grand right an' left.'

"When Hamilton turns away they're shorely makin' things rock an' tremble, an' all to the strains of 'The Arkansas Traveller,' which is bein' played next door at Hamilton's expense.

"'Which somethin's goin' to pop,' says Hamilton mighty ugly to Enright, an' the rest of us, as over at the Red Light he pours a drink into his neck. 'I allows in the interests of peace that I canters over an' sees you all first. I ain't out to shake up Wolfville, nor give Red Dog a chance to criticise us as a disorderly camp, but I asks you, gents, as citizens and members of the vigilance committee, whether I'm to stand an' let this yere sharp steal my music to hold his revels by, an' put it all over me nightly?'

"'I don't see no difference,' says Dave Tutt, 'between this yere convict a-stealin' of Hamilton's music than if he goes an' stands up Old Monte an' the stage.'

"'The same bein' my idea exact,' says Texas Thompson. 'Yere's Hamilton caterin' to this camp with a dance hall. It's a public good thing. If a gent's moroose an' his whiskey's slow gettin' action he goes over to Hamilton's hurdy-gurdy an' finds relaxation an' relief. Now, yere comes this stranger—an' I makes it 50 dols. even he's from Massachusetts—an' what does he do? Never ante nor sticks in a white chip, but purloins Hamilton's cadencies an' strains, an' pulls off his dances tharby. It's a dead wrong, an' what this party needs is hangin' some.'

"'Oh, I don't know,' says Cherokee Hall, who's in on the talk, 'Hamilton's all right an' a square man. All he wants is justice. Now while I deems the conduct of this yere stranger low an' ornery, still comin' right down to the turn, he's on his trail all right. Jest as he says: "Who gives Hamilton any licence to go fillin' this sharp's hurdy-gurdy full of dance music?" S'pose this gent would come caperin' over an' set in a stack agin Hamilton for over-loadin' his joint with pianer an' fiddle noises without his consent; an' puttin' it up he's out to drag the camp if Hamilton don't cease? The only way Hamilton gets round that kind of complaint is, he don't own them walses an' quadrilles after they fetches loose from his fiddles; an' he's not responsible after they gets stampeded off into space.'

"'That's straight,' says Dan Boggs, 'a gent can't own no music after he cuts it loose, that away. The minute it leaves the bosom of his fiddle, that's where he lets go of it. After that it belongs to the great American public to dance by, cry by, set by, or fight by, as they deems meet an' pleasant at the time.'

"'What do you all say?' says Hamilton to Enright and Peets. 'Does this yere piece of oppression on a leadin' citizen perpetrated by a rank outsider go? I shore waits for your reply with impatience, for I eetches to go back an' shoot up that new hurdy-gurdy from now till sun-up.'

"Enright takes Doc. Peet down by the end of the bar—an' thar's no doubt about it that Peets is the wisest long-horn west of the Missouri—an' they has a slight consultation. We was waiting some interested to see what they says. It's shore a fine p'int this Colonel's makin' to jestify an' back his play.

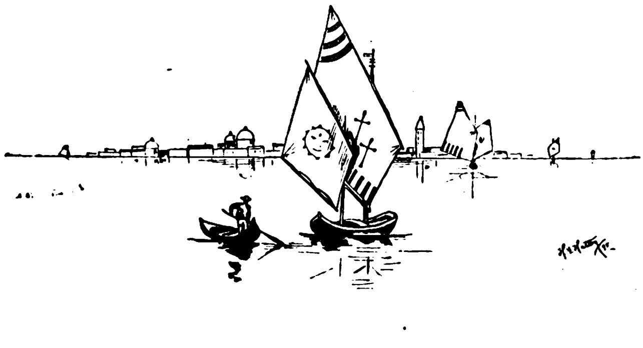
"'Get a move on you, Enright,' at last says Dan Boggs, who is a hasty, eager man, who likes action; 'get a move on, you an' Peets, an' settle this. You're gummin' the kyards an' delayin' the game.'

"'Well, gents,' says Enright, at last comin' back where we was by the door, 'Peets an' me sees no need of decidin' on them questions about who owns a tune after said tune has been played. But that is a question which requires consideration, an' which most likely solves this dance hall deadlock. In all trade matters in a growin' camp like Wolfville it's better to preserve a equilibrium. It's agin public interest to have two or three dance halls, or two or three saloons all in a bunch that away. It's better they be spattered around wide apart, which is more convenient. So Peets an' me proposes as a roole for this camp that two hurdy-gurdies be forbid to be carried on within say five hundred feet of each other. As it looks like nobody objects we concloods it's adopted. Nacherally, the last hurdy-gurdy up has to move, which disposes of this yere trouble.

"'Before I ends what I has to say,' goes on Enright, 'I wants to thank our townsman, Mr. Hamilton, for consultin' of the stranger prior to a killin'. It shows he's a law-abidin' man an' a credit to a camp; as well as mighty likely prolongs his stay on earth. If he'd pranced in an' skelped this maraudin' stranger, as I sees the deal, I don't reckon we could avoid swingin' him at the loop end of a lariat without makin' a dangerous precedent. As it is, his rival will be routed an' his life made serene as heretofore.

"'As to the execution of this new roole,' concloodes Enright, 'we leaves that to Jack Moore. He will wait on this party, an' explain the game. He must up stakes an' move his camp at least five hundred feet. If he calls on another shindig after he's warned, we takes our ponies an' our ropes an' yanks his outfit up by the roots. A gent of his enterprise, however, will come to a dead halt; an' his persecutions of Hamilton will cease.'

"'An' you all calls this yere a free camp?' says my Colonel mighty scornful when Jack Moore notifies him. 'If I don't line out for t'other end of camp you all will rope my joint an' pull it down. Well, that settles it; I jest quits you; I'd be shorely ashamed to put in my time with any such low-flung passel of sports. You may go back an' tell your folks that as you leaves you hears me give the call to my guests, "all promenade to the bar"; an' the dancin' is done. To-morry I departs for Red Dog to begin life anew. Wolfville is too slow a camp for any gent with any swiftness in him!'"



THE LAST REVEL.

I hurried along the road from town, for it was already late. Time had flown faster than I thought, and night had come on intensely dark by the time I reached the gate. The sky was overcast with heavy, lowering clouds, that seemed almost to brush the wavering tree-tops. The air was chill, and the wind blew from the east in unsteady gusts, driving the clouds and mist before it, and making chance wayfarers shiver under their great coats and wraps.

As I passed between the massive stone pillars, the couchant bronze lions seemed to start out of the darkness, and the gates closed heavily behind me. Their iron clang smote on my ear with a sound as of a knell, and a strange fear came over me again. It was gone in an instant, however, and I walked up the avenue that led to the house.

Beyond the trees the house loomed up—grotesque enough in the daytime, but giving in the darkness an impression of mild grandeur. Lights glittering here and there from its front, like elfin fires, where the curtains now and then swayed back from the windows, and seemed to justify the wild tale, as it ran among the townsfolk, that the house was haunted. Haunted it was, and by as restless and terrible a spirit as ever formed the theme of ghostly story; but he was yet of mortal form. As I walked up the broad steps to the doors, they swung open, and the light burst forth in a blinding glare.

"Am I late, Merton?" I asked of the solemn-visaged servant who took my coat as the doors noiselessly closed behind me.

"They're all here, sir," was his non-committal answer.

I entered the long room whence the sound of voices came fast and furious. The wild gorgeousness of the furnishings—the walls covered with rich draperies, the dark-framed paintings (the wildest and most horrible in art) that showed from between the heavy folds as they were drawn back, the chairs and tables, carved of strange woods into grotesque shapes—were mute witnesses to the wanton and eccentric tastes of the owner.

Under the brilliant lights a gay company of roisterers gave the final touch to the scene. Gathered round the tables, feverishly watching the throw of the dice or the turn of a card, their eyes seemed to glow with a brightness of their own, as if to rival the lights themselves. The clink of money, as it was piled up on the table, or swept into the winners' hands, the contagion of example, the confusion of voices, seemed to excite one and all to wilder extravagance. It was an intoxication of gambling.

Over the mad scene the host presided, the wildest of that wild company. He was, indeed, the fit leader of those about him. His name is still spoken with bated breath by those among whom he lived. It is, to them, the impersonation of evil. I dare not record it here, for the events of which I write are too recent; but he will be known to these lines as Charles Gordon, for both these names were his by right of christening.

As I entered he was standing by a table, over which three of his guests were feverishly bending.

"A hundred on the red!" I heard him cry, as he threw a handful of gold on the table. Then, as he caught sight of me, he came quickly forward without another thought of his wager.

"Hail again, Gilmore!" he cried gaily. "You come late. Time flies with us, you know. Five minutes yet before the supper is announced. Make the best or the worst of your time. Throw the golden fuel on the fires of Chance. See how it kindles the blood and gleams in the eye!" And he pushed me towards one of the tables.

There in a moment I was in the full tide of excitement; I felt a strange fascination in watching him to-night. His thick, black hair, which he allowed to grow long, reached in irregular waves below his collar. His dark eyes glistened, and his face, though marked and furrowed prematurely by dissipation, glowed with animation and force as he went from table to table, winning at one, losing at another, and talking boisterously all the time.

I have no doubt of it now. I believe—yes, I know—that he was stark mad. We might have known the dreadful truth if we had paused for a moment in the race he was leading us. But we were mad, too, in the spell that his strong will had cast over us. The reckless waste of his fortune, the grotesque fancy that he showed in the form and furnishing of his house, in his speech, in everything about him; his hare-brained acts, his reckless defiance of all laws, human and divine—one and all pointed to the awful fact that we never so much as suspected.

Suddenly there was a single loud tap on the brazen gong that hung above the door. I had heard it time and again, but to-night it gave me a violent start. It struck on my ears as the clanging gates had done before, with a sound as of a knell. I seemed not alone in this feeling, for I observed three or four others start in sudden fear. But Gordon himself felt no check of spirits; and, merrily, boisterously chattering, he led the way into the supper-room.

As we entered, a sudden dread fell upon the few more sensitive, and they halted at the door; for the room was furnished in the deepest black. Heavy draperies hung in sable folds from the walls, and stretched before the windows. Even the ceiling had been tinted to the same sombre hue since we had last been there—but three nights before. The lamps seemed oppressed by the dark draperies, and shed but a dusky light on the table beneath.

"Wh—hy is this?" asked one of those who had halted almost timidly on the threshold.

Gordon laughed boisterously.

"Isn't black as good a colour as the red—or was it blue?—that it displaced? Pah! come in. Don't stand staring there as though we were a muster of ghosts. Our sprits will glow with the colour of the ruddy wine," he continued gaily. "The hangings of a room cannot dim them."

In a moment more we were seated at the table, and the supper began. The wayward fancy of our host was as apparent in the luxuriance and display of strange dishes as in all else about him. But that which attracted the most notice was a large, wide-flaring vase of stone that stood in the centre of the table. Curious figures of men and animals were drawn upon it, and seemed by a phosphorescent play of light from their lines to be endowed with a life and motion of their own. The vase was nearly filled with something unknown. And now a singular thing happened. As a guest let his eye fall upon the vase, he became silent, and was not able to withdraw his gaze from the glowing figures. So at last a strange silence—strange for the place, at least—fell upon the company. Even our host waited for some one to speak.

"A curious vase, that," suggested one of the company at last.

"Yes," replied Gordon gravely. "Very curious."

"Where did it come from?" asked another.

His answer, that it had come from the infernal regions, was received with a wild burst of mirth, in which, I remembered afterwards, he did not join. He turned the conversation to some other subject, and the mad wit of the company was roused anew.

At length the wine was brought on, and the glasses were filled. But before we could pledge, as usual, to our host, Gordon himself arose.

"You asked," he began, "why I have decked our festal room in black. I turned aside your question for a moment. I planned a surprise. It is not in sorrow, but in joy, that I have covered these walls with sombre draperies. To-night there is a new guest at the feast. For him have I changed the decorations of the room—to him must the first toast be drunk." So saying, he placed his foot on a secret spring, and a grinning skeleton, fantastically draped in a long robe and wearing upon his head a semblance of a crown, was advanced from behind the hangings at the table's head to the place that had been left vacant. At the same instant he flung a lighted match into the vase. The liquid blazed up with a pale green flame, that threw a ghastly pallor on all in the company. "Death is our guest to-night," he cried. "Drink, then, to your King! Fill high! Pledge deep!"

We looked at each other, and even the stoutest quailed as the greenish light threw a pallor as of deadly fear on every face. For a moment there was profound silence, and each one listened to the beating of his own heart. But it was only for a moment. The wild freak of our mad chief was received with a shout of laughter, and the boldest cried:

"Hail to King Death!"

We drank standing under the greenish light of the wavering flame—looking like a band of corpses drinking to their destroyer. When we were seated again, one of the company asked, with some fling of hare-brained wit:

"Why do we meet with Death to-night? Why do we misuse good wine by pledging him?"

"Are we not thirteen at the table?" asked Gordon, with a mocking smile, that the ghastly wavering light changed to one of demoniac mirth. "Is it not foretold by that, that one of us shall die within the year? What then could be more fitting than our pledge to Death? Long live King Death!"

And he ended with a burst of laughter, so harsh and horrible that it might have come from the skeleton image of Death itself.

Suddenly he stopped his riotous mirth, and stared with eyes starting from their sockets at the dark wall before him. There was a look of awful fear upon his face, as though he saw there before him the head of the Medusa.

Then with a shriek of agony, he clasped his hands over his heart, as if he were already in the halls of Eblis, and the fatal hour had come. For a moment he stood thus, staring at the nameless horror, then reeled, fell heavily against the table, and dragged the cloth with him to the floor.

In panic and terror we rushed from the fatal room out of the house. Out in the chilling wind that now blew a gale, we halted without hats or overcoats, and spoke to each other with bated breath. But no one dared ask another if he had seen the awful vision that had frozen the blood of our mad host. The one who was last to leave the room whispered that the vase had fallen to the floor, and he had seen the green flame blazing over the prostrate form.

No one proposed to go back. And as we stood there whispering, fearing, lights began to glimmer at the darkened windows of the room we had left. Tongues of fire darted between the dark draperies—green-tinted flames that began to glow with a dash of red. One by one the windows were uncovered, and through them we could see the flames rising and falling, filling the whole room.

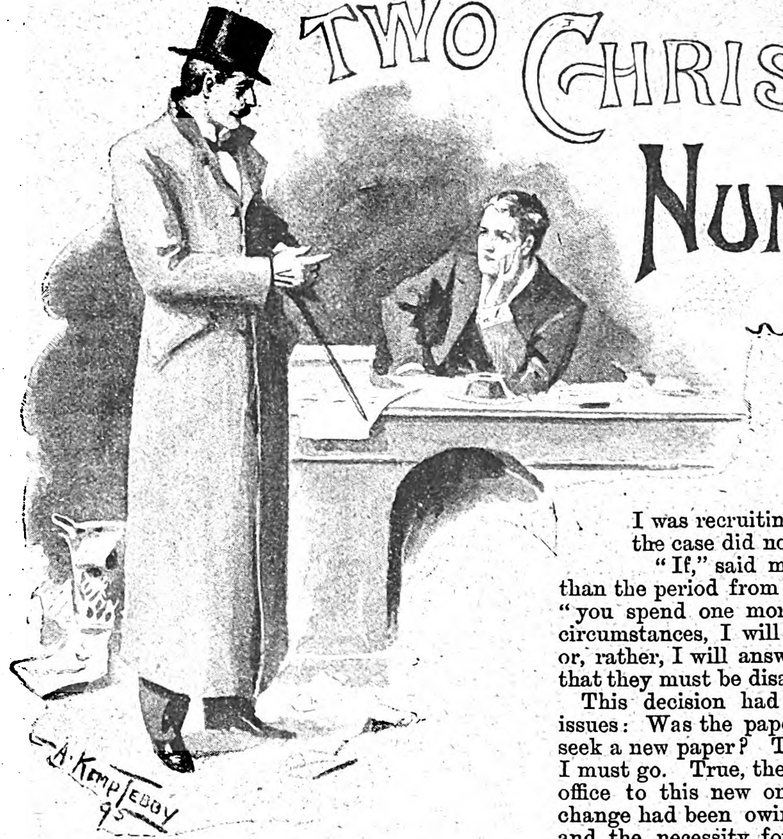
One of our number whispered that strange forms moved amid the blaze, and, indeed, it took but small fancy to make them out.

Horror at the awful fate of our companion froze all motion from us, and we could only watch the fire creep from window to window until the house was a mass of roaring flames. As they shot upwards from the roof, lighting the country like a great torch, the alarm of the fire was raised far and wide, and a crowd soon gathered round.

But there was nothing to be done. Hour by hour the flames blazed up and danced before the gale, until with a mighty crash the walls fell inward, and the madman's house was a heap of smoking ruins.

E. A. W.

TWO CHRISTMAS NUMBERS



FOR some years I was sub-editor of the *Illustrated Social Review*. It is devoted to—but I will not stop to puff the *Review*, explain its scope, or describe its method. The completeness of my disinterestedness will be felt when I assure my reader that I have received all the money I have earned of it; that there is no likelihood of my earning any more; and that in the week preceding Christmas last year I ceased to be connected with the paper.

In justice to myself I must say that my retirement was not caused by anything within the jurisdiction of my prudence or my ability. I resigned because I was suffering from fierce nervous excitement, which, my doctor soothingly assured me, threatened either my life or my sanity; he could not say for certain which.

"If I resign," said I to my doctor, "I lose the greater part of my income."

"If you don't resign," said he, in a tone that indicated his final opinion was in the words, "you will go over to either the great majority—the dead—or the lesser majority of the living—the fools."

I was not alone in the world. My people at home took an interest in me, and looked to me for housekeeping money, and I had been too long connected with the *Illustrated Social Review* not to have a well-defined notion of my duty as a social being; so I made up my mind (having some left still) to take my doctor's advice, and to live—well, to live in sanity.

If there had been any chance of my being able to resume my duties in six months, I have no doubt that the owner of the paper would have consented to accept the services of a substitute while I was recruiting my health; but the condition of the case did not allow this.

"If," said my doctor to me earlier in the case than the period from which I last quoted words of his, "you spend one more night in that office under any circumstances, I will not answer for the consequences; or, rather, I will answer for the consequences, and say that they must be disastrous."

This decision had narrowed the question to two issues: Was the paper to seek a new office, or was I to seek a new paper? The reply was sadly obvious to me. I must go. True, the paper had changed from the old office to this new one only a week before; but that change had been owing to the expansion of the paper and the necessity for more extensive offices, and had had nothing whatever to do with the nerves of any one of the staff.

In the week preceding Christmas two years ago a certain event took place. I shall now relate that event here.

The Christmas number of the *Illustrated Social Review* appeared each year the week before Christmas. It was not an "extra number," but the ordinary weekly issue swollen to about double the usual size. The literary matter of the Christmas number did not differ very largely from the literary matter of the ordinary weekly part. There was usually a long story illustrating some striking social question, and this story formed the only literary innovation on a routine number.

We went to press on Thursday night each week. Sometimes I was able to get away from the office at ten o'clock; often I did not find myself in a position to initial the sheets until past midnight. The Christmas number being the most important of the year, I rarely could get away until two or three in the morning. My chief usually looked in at about ten o'clock just to see that all was in order, and then left me. On Thursday night, the week before Christmas, 1893, the editor came at ten, we had a somewhat lengthened chat, he looked at the last proof-slips, and then left me to revise the pages and see the whole paper together and "pulled" before I took my leave.

It was a quarter past twelve o'clock when he and I shook hands, and he went slowly down the iron-edged stairs.

The printing-office was in a court off Fleet Street. In all the world there is no stiller place than one of these ghostly courts off Fleet Street, if the silence is not broken by the tear and chatter of printing machinery.

Winchester Court at the time my chief left was resounding to the rattle of two dozen machines. The room I was sitting in trembled like a frightened horse, the glass in the window clattered, and the whole air seemed torn by waves and cross waves of jarring noises.

In the basement of the house in which I sat three large machines were at work; on the ground floor four clanged and whirred; by my side, on the first floor, a gas-engine snorted, and shook its iron rack, and struggled like a chained wild beast striving to escape; while a number of lithographic machines croaked and muttered all round me like a swarm of monster bull-frogs or a flight of gigantic mosquitoes.

This uproar of machinery made it necessary to speak loudly in order to make oneself heard. The tone of ordinary conversation would seem a hoarse, indistinct whisper. No sound from the court outside could reach me, and no sound I could make would have any chance of reaching ears not within the four walls of my room.

Just before the editor left me the foreman printer had been down to take away some proofs and speak with the chief and myself. When the foreman was going away I had said to him:

"Well, Mr. Bain, when will you have anything more for me to look at?"

"Not for an hour, sir," was his answer; so that when I found myself alone, I looked round the room to try and find something I might read. With a sigh I resigned myself to my fate. There was nothing to read, nothing to do for an hour.

Although it was cold and raw and damp abroad, the room in which I sat was bright and warm. Indeed, it was almost too warm; the steam all round gave the place the close feeling of an oven. I had always noticed that after spending an hour or two in that room I felt as weak and weary as though I had sauntered all day through a strange city to meet some one who never came.

The room was not more than twelve feet by twelve. In the centre stood a shabby writing-table, at which I sat; opposite to me was the door ajar. A gas-jet was burning on the landing without; no other door opened on that landing. Between the table and the door stood a chair; across the high window stretched a large, deep desk, which filled up that whole side of the room; on my right-hand side, as I sat, stretched, from floor to ceiling, shelves upon which lay old wood-blocks and stereotypes of blocks. My table was jammed up against the shelf-case; into the room on my left side a press projected, leaving only about a foot and a half between the corner of the press and my table.

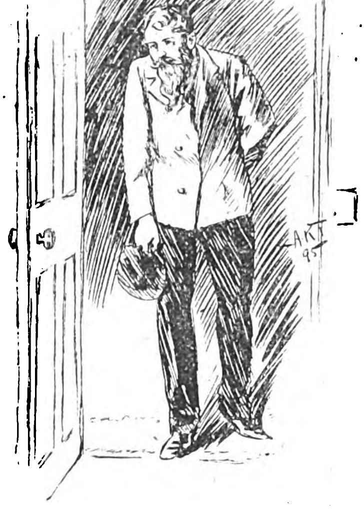
I was sitting in a dreamy reverie, when some one knocked softly, very softly at the door.

"Come in," I shouted, thinking it to be a boy with a message from the foreman printer.

Although my face was bent over the table, my eyes fixed on the paper, I was conscious that the door opened slowly, that the person who had knocked had not entered, and that it was a man, and not a boy with proofs, as I had at first imagined. I raised my eyes. A low-sized, square, powerful-looking man of about thirty-five stood with an air of great humility in the doorway, holding his hat in his right hand in front, and keeping his left hand behind him out in the landing.

Something about this man made me observe him closely. At the time I did not know why his appearance claimed my attention so strongly. He was almost in tatters. His boots were open at the toes; his trousers jagged at the heels and between the ankles; his hat, a soft felt one, was without a lining and green with age. His coat and waistcoat were of a dingy yellowish tweed; his trousers had once been a decent black, but now they were streaked and shiny.

From underneath a shabby yellow beard a dirty blue scarf fell, and occupied the whole open space of the waistcoat. His face was white and calm, the forehead being singularly white and well formed.



"May I come in?"

"What can this man be? What does he want here?" were the questions I put to myself. "I can't guess, and I don't like him," were my mute replies. I was weak and low and nervous. I looked at the window—no chance of escape that way. I looked at the door—he barred it up completely, and one blow from such an arm as held his hat would dispose of me.

I knew the outer door was open; I knew he was not a printer; I knew no one was likely to pass up or down that staircase for a long time. I knew my voice might as well be buried six feet underground as in that room, for all it would avail me to summon assistance. What had that man in his left hand? Why did he keep his hand so strangely behind his back? What did this man want with me? I had never seen him before.

"May I come in, sir?" asked the man, in a dull hoarse voice.

"Yes," I answered. "What can I do for you? Are you sure you have not mistaken the room?"

"You are the sub-editor of the *Illustrated Social Review?*" he asked, crossing the threshold, and taking the handle of the door in his right hand under the hat. While he stood thus sideways, he still kept the left hand pointed towards the passage, and out of my sight.

"Yes," I answered again; and repeated, "what can I do for you?"

"May I say a few words to you in private?"

"I am quite alone."

"May I shut the door? I don't want anyone to see me in here."

I reviewed the case as swiftly as he spoke. If he had any harmful intention he could carry it out in spite of me; he could close the door at that moment and spring on me. If he had no harmful intention it was indifferent to me whether the door was open or shut. Thus in either case I might as well assent. I merely nodded an affirmative.

Still keeping that left hand concealed from me, he shut the door, closed it carefully, and then turned the key! He stooped down near the door, deposited whatever he had in his hand on the ground, and approached the table. On the ground near the door I saw, when he moved a little aside, a large cup of tea, and in the saucer against the cup a big piece of bread.

A sharp pang of pity for this man went through me when I found what he had carried so cautiously and so secretly. I rose, went to the door, took up the cup and saucer, set them on the table, and, placing a chair for him, said:

"Sit down and take your tea while you talk to me. No one will want to come in here for an hour. Now, what do you wish to say to me?"

He looked at me for some time out of strange eyes, in which for a moment the audacity was a little subdued. He drew a long breath, and then spoke:

"Although you see me as I am now, I am a man of good education. I have never been regularly connected with the editorial part of any paper, but I have had something to do with newspapers for some time. I am doing a little reading here now. I did not want those common printers to see me in here speaking to you. Common men are so common, aren't they?"

I looked away from the poor fellow's tattered coat and starved bold eyes, and answered: "Yes."

"Common men are fearfully common. I was once in a poor-house, and I know. I didn't want these working printers, if they passed up or down, to see me talking to a gentleman; they make fun of me so. Do you know there is a conspiracy against me? Did you ever hear that?"

I looked back to him swiftly, and thought: "The man is mad; the door is locked, and the yells of a Titan could reach no human ears! Heaven be merciful to me, and compassionate towards those who depend upon me!"

I said aloud, assuming a tone of sympathy: "If I were you I should not bother about those common men. Won't you drink your tea?"

He shook himself, and passed his hand quickly, nervously across his white forehead; shook himself again; then he fixed his daring eyes on mine, and burst out suddenly and so rapidly that I could scarcely follow him:

"You are the sub-editor of the *Illustrated Social Review*; why aren't you the friend of the mad? Tell me that?" he shouted excitedly, thrusting his white face close to mine.

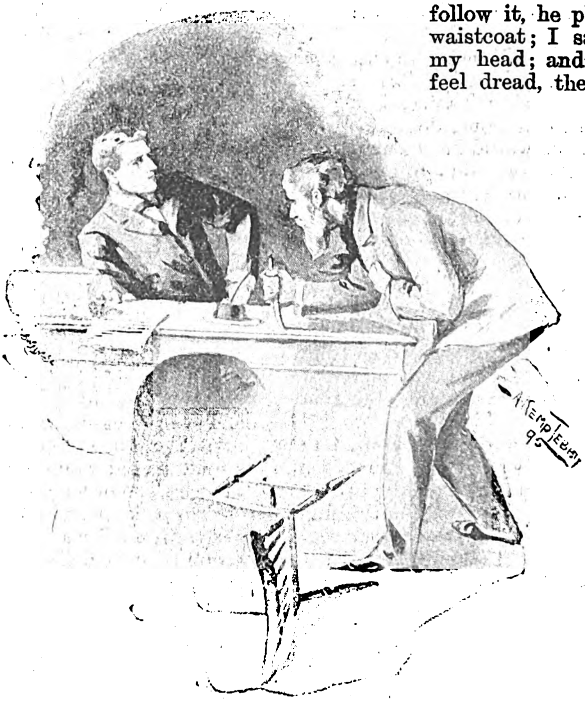
He shivered and drew back from me, stood up, shivered again. Then, covering his face with his hand for a minute, he remained immovable. In a few seconds his chest and shoulders began to heave, and I could hear him sob. Through his sobs he spoke: "My darlings, my darlings, good-bye! They did not let me say good-bye to you. They pounced upon me in the middle of the night, and carried me off and locked me up for three long years, and when I came out all my darlings were dead!"

His arms fell to his side as though he were shot through the heart. He threw up his white face, clenched his fists, and buried one under the breast of the mean waistcoat; then, raising his other hand clenched to Heaven, he shouted: "He took my wife and children from me! He killed them when I was locked up—he, John Kempston, did it; and, by the Maker of us two, John Kempston and me, I'll leave that in his heart some night!"

With an action so swift that I could not follow it, he plucked his hand out of his waistcoat; I saw something glitter above my head; and before I had time even to feel dread, the point of a long knife was buried an inch in the table, and the haft trembling between his face and mine.

He put his two hands on the table, leant down, and glared at the trembling blade.

A knock at the door. A second knock, the handle of the door turned.



The point of a long knife was buried an inch in the table.

* * * *

It was many days before I regained my customary peace and balance of mind after that disturbing night; and even when I had got back my usual tone in daylight, my nights were very trying for a long time.

I had always been nervous and imaginative; and it was a source of wonder to those who knew me well, and to myself, that I so rapidly recovered from the shock. But for months my nights were restless. If I sat up late at home, as I often was obliged to do, I dreaded to leave the room and the gaslight in which I sat.

If a door opened or a mouse ran across the floor, I looked up with a start, sure that I could see the rigid white face, the madman's blazing eye, the sharp flash of glittering brightness through the air; and then I felt the blade between my shoulders—not in the table, but between my shoulders—with the whole of the madman's weight pressing down upon the weapon.

I wonder I did not go mad. The brains of many men have been turned by less. After that memorable Thursday night I often debated with myself whether I should take any steps against the man who had so terrified me. But in reality he had neither done anything to me nor threatened me.

I made inquiries, and found that his name was William Dee; that he had been in a lunatic asylum for three years, during which time his wife and two children died; and that about a year ago he had been discharged as cured. He was regarded as "odd," "strange," "touched," but everyone to whom I spoke looked on him as perfectly harmless.

The form of his craze was peculiar, almost unique; he was mad about madness itself. Any illusion to insanity threw his mind at once off its balance.

He had first shown symptoms of insanity about five years before. Its earliest form was a delusion that every dwelling-house he entered had a mad-house attached to it, in which were confined members of the family afflicted with mental malady. The aggravated form of this delusion followed; and then he fancied that not only had every private house its own private mad-house, but that the inmates of the latter were cruelly and basely ill-treated.

Then he commenced to preach a crusade against these private lunatic asylums. He failed to attract any followers. He essayed the deliverance of the captives himself, and selected for the first attempt the house of Mr. John Kempston, of Long Acre. Mr. Kempston called in the police and handed William Dee over to them. The police sent him to the parish, and the parish to Colney Hatch.

His belief that Mr. Kempston stopped him at the outset of his great career, and that Mr. Kempston was personally the whole cause of his having been locked up, made him in his moments of excitement vow undying hatred and thirst of revenge against that man, who, however, was quite beyond the reach of Dee's anger, as he had emigrated to New Zealand soon after the unhappy Dee was first confined. It was only in the great pressure of business in the week before Christmas that Dee got employment at our printing-office. The week after Christmas he was gone, so that my chance of any more trouble from him was slight indeed.

In December next year the *Illustrated Social Review* changed publication-office and printing-office. The printing-office was now in Deerhound Court, Fleet Street.

As Christmas approached I was too busy to give much thought to my health. Several friends had remarked that I looked thin and worn. But I explained this to myself and them by saying I was greatly overworked, for not only had I then the ordinary work of my own paper, and the preparation of the Christmas number, but I had been employed to edit and write a good deal for a trade annual, and I was greatly worn down altogether.

It is a strange thing that, although I then looked upon myself as completely recovered from the effect of the events which occurred the Thursday night preceding Christmas, 1893, I never ran low physically from any cause without more or less suffering a relapse into the wretched state of nervous timidity which followed immediately upon the shock a year ago.

As in the former printing-office, we had an editorial room in the new one. It was, however, situated differently. In the old office it had been on the first floor. Here it was on the third, being the highest but the attic. It was a long, narrow room. At one end a window looked into the silent, deserted court. At the other end was the staircase to the upper floor, not partitioned off from the room.

My table stood in the window, and about twenty feet from the head of the staircase leading down through the stair-well, also not partitioned off. Although I call this the editorial room, of course we had another and much better room at the publishing office; but the one at the printing-office was the real one for hard work, and all the night work had to be done here, in order that I might be near to the printers.

The floor below was the printer's counting-house, shut up for the night; the floor above, an attic lumber-room.

We were much more forward with the work this year than we had been last. On Thursday night before Christmas week the editor went away at ten o'clock, leaving me in charge. "You'll be able to get off at about twelve," said he, as he tied his muffler round his neck at the top of the unprotected stair-well. While he was descending I heard a clock strike ten. I shouted to him to send up the foreman. He answered: "All right!" and for the first time I was alone by night in the new office.

The room was in strong contrast, and the surroundings in stronger contrast, to the room and surroundings of that day twelve months. The chamber was long and bleak, and an oppressive silence filled the court. In the basement of this house the machines groaned and muttered; but the sound was deadened and afar off: it seemed to desire to conceal itself from notice. I felt I should like to have had a dog or a child with me. It was very lonely up there; very dreary and lonely up there, away from every one.

At last I heard a foot ascending the stairs, and in a few minutes the hard features of the foreman rose above the level of the floor.

He came in, and we had a short chat about the work. As he was going, he said, with a grin, while he wiped his hands in his apron:

"You're quiet enough up here, sir. There's not more row here now than under the dome of St. Paul's at this moment."

"When shall I have the proofs of the pages up?" I asked.

"I'll send you up two or three in half an hour," said the foreman, as he disappeared down the stairs.

Once more I was alone in that long narrow room. I had nothing to do for half an hour.

"As quiet as under the dome of St. Paul's at this moment," I thought, adopting the notion of the foreman. "The grave is not so quiet as the vast chill concave of that dome now," I followed on, indulging my imagination.

There was only one gas-jet in the room, and that was on my table, so that the end of the room near the stair-well was in comparative darkness. I stared down into the dimness, and continued, following up the idea the foreman had started:

"What silence, what abysses of silence there are in that great chasm of darkness, the inexplorable dome! For no earthly consideration would I sit on one of those chairs now, with my back to all the echoing voices and ghastly tomb-incrusted walls."

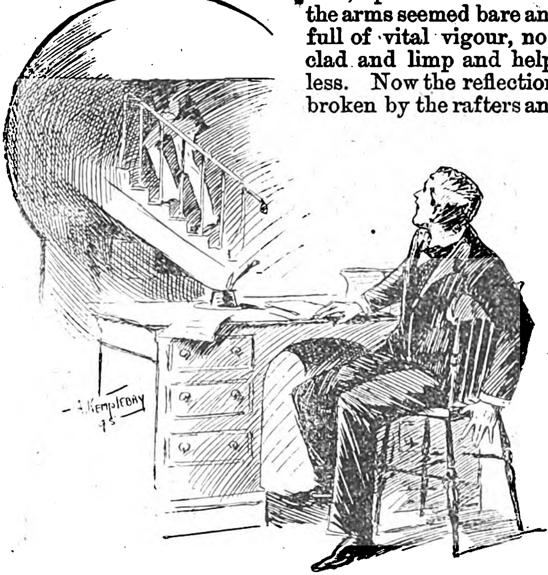
I felt myself shiver, and cast down my eyes for a while to steady my thoughts. I strove to drive the idea from me; but it had seized firm hold of my imagination, and would not go.

The cold sweat now streamed down my forehead.

I raised my eyes, and saw ascending by the staircase through the ceiling the legs of a man!

At that sight the last resources of my physical powers failed. I could not stir to save my life. I had no desire to stir. I felt numbed and deadened, and sustained in consciousness by only one desire, a supreme curiosity.

I do not know how long I remained thus spellbound, but it must have been more than a quarter of an hour. All that time the shadow of the man was ceaselessly moving hither and thither, up and down. Now the arms seemed bare and full of vital vigour, now clad and limp and helpless. Now the reflection, broken by the rafters and distorted by the cobwebs, was that of a pair of naked legs, now of legs loosely robed and supple.



I raised my eyes, and saw ascending by the staircase through the ceiling the legs of a man!

At last it seemed plain that there were two figures in the loft.

I could now make out that the partly nude figure had on nothing but a shirt; this was the active figure. The other lay apparently on the ground close to the candle, and never stirred save when moved by the other.

Just then the stillness of this upper place was broken by a yell of enraptured rage. I saw a flash of keen cool light dash among the rafters, and then I saw the shadow of the naked arm spring aloft with something long and sharp-pointed in the hand. Presently this swept down to the accompaniment of a scream of hate. I heard the blade tear through and through, and bite deep into the plank. I watched to see the first red trickle through the cracked ceiling, for now the body was of no dead man, but of one drugged or stunned by other means.

I had lost all thought of my own personality now. I may say I had no longer any feeling of being present at this scene. I was no more than a pair of eyes that could not turn away from this square opening, and an intelligence swallowed up in the passionless contemplation of what the eyes revealed.

Here the light in the loft went out. But I heard other blows struck in the dark. At last the blows ceased, and I heard a sound as of some body dragged across the floor.

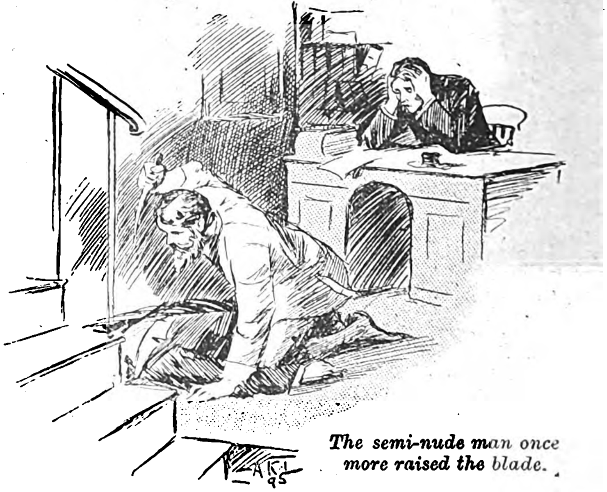
Two legs fell partly down through the trap-door—legs wanting the feet! Then the body and the limp, powerless arms.

My eyes never moved; no sound escaped me even when the acme of horror was reached, and I saw a bare left arm buried in the bosom of the figure, and a bare right arm whirled aloft and strike the bosom with a knife, and then, as the two figures rolled down the stairs into the room, saw that the trunk was headless!

The semi-nude man once more raised the blade above his head and buried it in the helpless man. Then stepping back a pace from the prostrate figure, he yelled: "Take your death of me, John Kempston!" As he uttered the last word he tripped in something, staggered back, and disappeared. I heard him strike the balustrade and fall to the flagged bottom of the stair-well. Then all was still.

When they took up the dead body of William Dee from the flags at the bottom of the stairs, they found nothing on it but a shirt. The rest of his clothes he had formed into an effigy upon which to wreck the vengeance he nourished against John Kempston. As in the last year in the old office, so in the present year at the new, he had got a job as extra proof-reader, with permission to sleep in the loft. His work was done, and he received a little money at nine o'clock. It was supposed he drank, and that the drink overcame his slight stock of reason, and betrayed him into the violence which led to his death.

They found me insensible, with my head bowed on the table. I have not even yet recovered fully. I have been asked to write a story, and I thought that I might as well recount my strange experience of Two Christmas Numbers.



The semi-nude man once more raised the blade.

A PROPOSAL BY PROXY.

By Mrs. GEORGE CORBETT.

Author of "The Adventures of an Ugly Girl," "A Mere Masquerader," etc., etc.

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CHAPTER I.

"GLADYS, will you go to the Elysian Theatre with us this evening?" inquired Miss Eady, though she had no doubt as to the nature of her friend's reply.

"Oh, Alice! Do you really mean it?" cried Gladys Youll, springing to her feet, and evincing every sign of glee. "There's nothing in the world I would like better. It is good of you to remember me. Who will be going?"

"Father, mother, and our two selves. We have a box for four, and it would have been a shame to waste a seat when you are so fond of the theatre. I expect we shall have a lovely evening, for everybody is raving about *The Flower Girl.*"

"It is sure to be a lovely evening for me! What time must I be ready?"

"We will call for you at 7.30 prompt."

"I really don't know how I shall contain myself until it is time to go. I think I'll begin to dress in the middle of the afternoon."

Both girls laughed at this, for Gladys was one of the elder daughters in a busy household, and, instead of spending the day in preparing for an evening's amusement such as rarely came her way, she would need to be more industrious than ever.

The Youlls were a very united family, though they had a hard struggle to make ends meet, and when it was known that Gladys was to sport evening dress, both her mother and her sisters showed themselves anxious to make her as presentable as possible.

"You must wear my chiffon blouse. It is fresher than yours," said Eva.

"And I'll lend you my pearls," added Mrs. Youll, looking with fond pride at the girl who was the acknowledged beauty in a family of which every member was comely; whilst Gladys' other sisters volunteered their assistance.

"I shan't look the least bit shabby," she reflected, "thanks to the good nature of the others. I wish I knew how to earn some money, so that I might be really helpful at home."

Her thoughts often took this direction, but they generally ended in an impatient sigh, for her parents belonged to the old-fashioned school, and contemplated no future means of providing for their daughters save matrimony.

But the whole world changed to her that night, for she had at last, she thought, found her vocation.

"Alice," she whispered, "I mean to go on the stage."

"Do you? Isn't that rather sudden? And won't it wear off just as suddenly? Every girl takes a fancy to the stage some time or other."

"But mine isn't merely a fancy of that sort. There are too many of us at home. I want to ease my father's burdens a little, and I mean to try and see Mr. Clarkson, the manager, to-morrow, about an engagement."

"But you have had no stage experience."

"And how much stage experience is necessary to pose as all those girls do? I don't mean the principals, for I am not stupid enough to imagine that I can get a big part straight away."

"No, I don't suppose you could manage that. But if there happens to be a vacancy you might stand a chance in the chorus. You have both a good voice and a good presence. Yes, I would try if I were you."

Here the curtain rose upon the most effective act in a gorgeously produced burlesque, but, though Gladys was an eager onlooker, her thoughts were chiefly of a practical bent, and their outcome was nothing less than another visit to the Elysian Theatre next morning for the purpose of interviewing the manager, to whom she wished to apply for an engagement.

But busy managers are not easily interviewed, and several attempts were necessary before Gladys could get a word with Mr. Clarkson. When at last she entered his presence she was terribly afraid of being sent peremptorily about her business. He was, however, very pleasant and kind in his manner, as he put various questions to her in response to her application for an engagement. When at last he had learned all he wished from her he gave her a note to take down to the musical conductor.

"Mr. Fairlie will hear you sing," he said, "and if he is quite satisfied with you, you will probably hear further from me. Leave me your address so that I may know where to find you."

Gladys left the manager's presence with a heart beating high with hope, but this had plenty of time to evaporate before Mr. Fairlie had time to attend to her. There were about fifteen girls here, all having their voices tested. The ordeal was being gone through on the stage, but the voices had a strange, unreal sound, which meandered weirdly about the empty auditorium.

Mr. Fairlie was strictly non-committal. After each test he jotted down some items in a book kept for the purpose, and dismissed the candidate without the slightest hint of the results of her efforts.

Gladys fared exactly like the rest, and then passed through a period of suspense that was very trying to a girl of her impetuous disposition.

Meanwhile she was receiving more invitations than usual, and was becoming quite a gay young lady, being always aided by her generous younger sisters in her efforts to look as nice as possible.

"There will be nothing fit for anybody to wear soon," she reflected ruefully. "I've half a mind to decline Alice's invitation to spend a whole week with her, for it hardly seems fair to the other girls."

But poor Gladys was not equal to the self-sacrifice she contemplated, for the little god, Cupid, had struck her with one of his darts, and she could not deny herself the pleasure of meeting a certain Kenneth, surnamed Saxon, who was a frequent visitor at the house of the Eady's, and who was desperately in love with our heroine.

Unfortunately, he was too modest in his estimate of his own manly attractions to believe that, so charming a girl as Gladys Youll would deign to think twice of him, and she, mistaking his shyness for indifference, was careful to give him no reason to guess her preference for him.

Mr. Saxon had a friend who was his almost inseparable companion, and who had also lost his heart to Gladys Youll. His name was Clarkson Dean, and he was very much more good-looking than his friend. But the preference of girls is not always to be accounted for, and neither of the young men imagined that Miss Youll seldom gave a thought to the one who was usually regarded with favour by mothers and daughters alike, since in character and fortune he was above reproach.

CHAPTER II.

For some days a feeling of reserve had been growing up between Kenneth Saxon and Clarkson Dean. Each knew himself to be in love, but each was shy about making the admission to his friend, and each was ignorant of the fact that they were both in love with the same girl. There was, however, this difference between the two young men.

Kenneth believed his love to be hopeless, and, therefore, did not dream of proposing to Gladys. Clarkson, without being particularly conceited, thought he had as good a chance as any other fellow, but hardly liked to face the possibility of rejection.

"I wish the business was nicely over," he thought. "A girl like that is worth anybody's winning, and there is no time to waste if I am to prevent somebody stepping in before me. But I really haven't the nerve to propose to her myself. For one thing, opportunity does not offer itself, unless I go into the matter boldly, and hunt Miss Youll up at her own home. Then I should be quizzed by all her sisters, and laughed at if she refused me. I know what I'll do. I'll get Kenneth to propose to her for me. People often do propose by proxy, and he could present the few advantages I possess better than I could myself. A fellow can't go boasting about his riches to the woman he wants to marry."

Thus it happened that Kenneth Saxon received a commission that almost took his breath away, but which he nevertheless made up his mind to discharge honourably.

"It's hard lines to be asked to propose for somebody else," was his rueful reflection, "but it's infinitely worse when the girl to whom you are to propose is the one you are in love with yourself. But Clarkson doesn't suspect me to have any personal feelings in the matter, and I'll discharge my duty honourably, though my heart breaks in the task."

"A gentleman to see Miss Gladys on business," announced the housemaid at four o'clock on the following day, and Gladys rose with heightened colour to receive her visitor. For a moment she imagined that he might be a messenger from Mr. Clarkson, and she hardly knew whether to be more pleased or disappointed when she saw Kenneth Saxon.

"I hope you will excuse my intrusion," the latter began, looking remarkably ill at ease. "The fact is, I am the bearer of a message to you. My friend Clarkson ——"

"Mr. Clarkson!" exclaimed Gladys delightedly, thinking that the manager of the Elysian Theatre was being referred to, and jumping at once to the conclusion that Mr. Saxon's message was the long-expected answer to her application for a theatrical engagement. "Do you know him?"

"Know him? Why, yes. He and I have been friends for years. That is why he asked me to see you."

"I hope your message will remove all my anxiety. I have been expecting to hear from him for some time."

"Oh! have you really? It's only about a month since you first saw him."

Kenneth was feeling a little surprised bewilderment, that was by no means diminished as the conversation proceeded.

"I believe it is only about a month ago," answered Gladys, who was as much at cross purposes as he was. "But there is plenty of time to make up one's mind in a month, and I really thought him horribly slow."

"Oh, indeed! Then you are quite prepared to accept his proposal?"

"Certainly. Don't I tell you that I have been waiting for it? Stay. There are, of course, certain pecuniary considerations——"

"You need not trouble about that, Miss Youll. I have Clarkson's authority for stating that he intends to be most liberal in pecuniary matters."

"Oh, isn't that lovely? And it's really an engagement?"

"Certainly, if you are willing to be a party to it."

"And when do you think I can see him? I want to come to a definite arrangement as soon as possible. Do you thing I might go and see him to-night?"

"Well, I don't know, Miss Youll. I'm not so sure that it would be quite the thing for you to do. I had better see Clarkson first, and tell him that my mission has been entirely successful. Then he will call and see you himself to-morrow morning, and you can arrange details between yourselves."

"Yes, that will be best. And tell him that it's a definite engagement."

"Oh, that's all right. As you say, it's a definite engagement. But I'd better be going now. I have done all that I can, and I feel——"

Poor Kenneth was going to say that he felt rather upset at the eagerness with which his friend's proposal by proxy had been accepted, and at the certainty that his own faint hopes were finally shattered. But he thought better of it, and welcomed the girl's jubilant interruption.

"Don't imagine that I am not grateful to you," she cried. "You have sent me into the seventh heaven of delight."

Kenneth Saxon quitted Miss Youll's presence, feeling more disgusted than he had ever dreamed it possible to feel with her, and pulled his moustache quite savagely as he strode towards Clarkson Dean's chambers.

"Well, if she isn't the most mercenary little wretch it was ever my lot to meet," he reflected. "She never inquired if he loved her, but thought of pecuniary matters straight away. Not much need either to beat about the bush with a girl who tells you plump that she has been expecting your message. I don't believe she cares a straw for him, for all she has accepted him. It's a purely mercenary business on her side, and it is a blessing that I didn't propose to her myself, seeing that

I am, by comparison with Clarkson, only a poor man."

Clarkson Dean was looking through the window, which commanded a view of the street, for the return of his friend. All the while Kenneth had been away, he had been tortured by the conviction that he had taken a foolish step in proposing by proxy.

"I ought to have seen her myself," he muttered. "She is a high-spirited girl, and may resent the diffidence which made me afraid to propose to her in person. What fools men can be when they are in love. Ah! there he comes at last. Now to know my fate! If his glum face is an index to go by, I'm out of the running."

Poor Clarkson had barely patience to wait until Kenneth entered his sitting-room, so anxious was he to know what he had to tell him.

"Come, out with it, Kenneth," he said hastily. "Have I been refused?"

"On the contrary," was the reply, given without any of the elation which the occasion would seem to warrant, "on the contrary, you have been accepted with eagerness, and I had no difficulty whatever in delivering my message. You are to see her yourself to-morrow morning."

"Isn't that lovely!"

"That's just what she said."

"Did she really? I say, old fellow, you've done me no end of a service, and I shall be grateful to you all my life. Of course, you'll be best man?"

"Thanks, I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me."

"Excuse you, why? You like Miss Youll, don't you?"

But Kenneth's feelings had been probed enough for one day, and he felt a sudden access of emotion that made further conversation just then intolerable to him.

"I must be off now," he said desperately, and there was something in his dejected manner that suddenly revealed the whole truth to Clarkson Dean.

"Good Heavens," was the latter's reflection, "I do believe he loves her himself! What a brute he must have thought me."

But any regrets on Kenneth's score had no chance of being explained to that much-enduring young man, for he left the place without any further ceremony, and strode towards his own less luxurious lodgings.

CHAPTER III.

On the following morning Gladys took especial pains with her toilet, for she wanted to make as good an impression as possible upon Mr. Clarkson. She was ready by ten o'clock, and was waiting in the drawing-room when the servant announced "a gentleman to see Miss Gladys," and, rising eagerly to meet the theatrical manager, she was astonished to see Mr. Dean approach her with a beaming face that bespoke perfect satisfaction with the whole world.

"You darling!" he exclaimed, almost before the door had fairly closed behind the servant; "how shall I thank you enough for making me so happy?"

And then, before the amazed girl could fathom his intentions, he had her in his arms, and was kissing her passionately.

But he was soon convinced that he had made a mistake, for the young lady whom he believed to be his plighted wife struggled wildly to free herself from his embrace, and as soon as her hands were free she gave her adorer a push that sent him staggering to the other end of the drawing-room.

"How dare you!" she panted furiously. "What reason have I ever given you to suppose that I would allow you to kiss me?"

"What reason?" was the astonished reply. "Why, what better reason could you give me than to accept me for your future husband?"

"Accept you for my future husband? You must be dreaming, Mr. Dean!"

"Not if my proxy gave me a correct version of the interview that took place between you yesterday. He told me that you accepted my proposal without the slightest hesitation."

"But I have never seen anybody who had such an unusual message as a proposal to bring to me, and, in any case, I should scarcely be likely to accept anybody by proxy!"

By this time Clarkson was becoming uncomfortably convinced that there was something radically wrong somewhere, and he stammered rather than spoke his next question.

"Surely Kenneth Saxon was here yesterday?"

"Certainly. But he came on business connected with an engagement I have been applying for. He came from a Mr. Clarkson."

"He came from me. Don't you know that my name is Clarkson? Clarkson Dean?"

At this confirmation of a horrible doubt that had begun to assail her, poor Gladys turned so pale that Clarkson feared she was about to fall, and would have gone to her assistance, had she not waved him back.

"Do you mean to tell me that Mr. Saxon had no message from Mr. Clarkson, of the Elysian Theatre, for me?"

"I repeat that he was here entirely at my request, and if there has been a mistake of any kind, pray let me rectify it now. I have loved you ever since the minute I first saw you, and——"

"Oh, don't!" she moaned. "I can't bear it! I shall never get over this humiliation. And I suppose he despises me for all the horrible things I said! Do you know—I told him that I expected his message; that I was delighted to receive the proposal he brought me; that pecuniary considerations were of importance in the matter?

"Oh dear! I think I shall go mad! and to think that Kenneth could have the heart to bring me a proposal from anybody else."

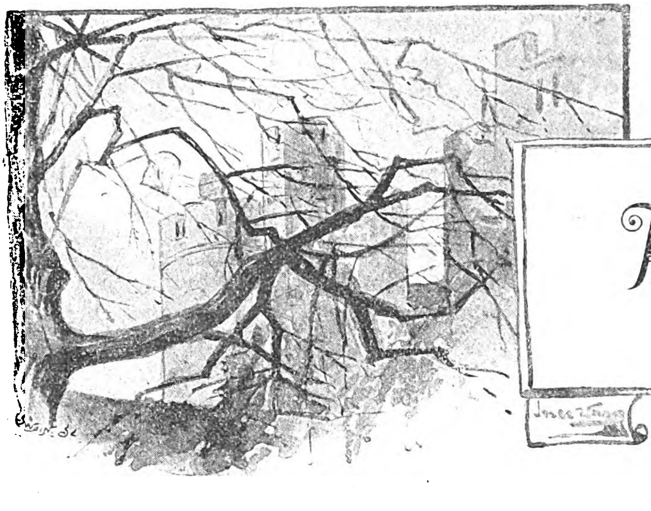
By this time the girl was crying wildly, and poor Clarkson considered a speedy departure the best course for him to pursue. So he quitted the room at once, leaving Gladys to sob out her rage and humiliation at her leisure.

"The fact of the matter is that they are in love with each other, and I have been slow not to perceive before," he thought. "But my name isn't Clarkson Dean if I don't put matters right now."

* * * *

Mr. Dean must have been as good as his word, for when the writer last heard of Miss Youll she was engaged to be married to Kenneth Saxon. The manager of the Elysian Theatre has never offered her an engagement. But as she has given up all thoughts of going on the stage that doesn't matter.

Miss Eva Youll cannot understand her sister's failure to appreciate Mr. Dean. The latter is now more in love with Eva than ever he was with Gladys, and when he proposes to her he will certainly not do so by proxy.



A RAILWAY GHOST.

As there is a ghost in this story, according to all established rules it ought to commence with "once upon a time," but as I am somewhat of an iconoclast, not even such a venerable figure of speech can escape annihilation at my hands.

Let me be exact in chronology at least. I had been hastily summoned from Cornwall to the bedside of a wealthy old uncle from whom I had expectations, and as the telegram informed me that he could not survive his present attack of gout, I thought it might be as well for me to be "in at the death"; and so one foggy day in November, 1880, found me travelling to Ashbourne, a little out-of-the-way place, where the old gentleman lived. There were but a few passengers in the train, and I had the comfort of a carriage all to myself. We stopped at some little wayside station, when a passenger was hurriedly ushered, or rather banged, into my compartment by the conductor.

The stranger was a tall, thin, middle-aged man, with a face lean and withered like a shrivelled apple. In a dress, tight-fitting, and of an ancient and faded black, he looked like a man who had run very much to seed, which perhaps accounted for the luxuriant growth of his arms and legs. Observing his clothes steaming with the damp air, I began to realise that it had suddenly become very cold.

"Quite a change in the weather," I remarked. "Very cold to-night, is it not?"

"Don't feel the cold myself. Perhaps you would like to change places with me; there is no draught here."

I replied that I should be glad to do so if it did not inconvenience him, and accordingly we changed seats.

It was cold, and no mistake. I must have taken a chill, for I felt the cold creeping over me in a most unaccountable manner. Looking at my companion on whom the light now shone full, I saw that his face was not so thin nor his features so withered as I at first supposed; and I must have made a mistake as to his age, for he was by no means as old as I had previously judged.

How cold it was, to be sure! As I looked at him, noticed that his aspect changed momentarily—that he was growing younger; that the wrinkles in his face were filling out and smoothing down, and that he was gradually becoming like some one I had seen before. As his cheeks grew round and ruddy, and his hair changed from grey to brown before my very eyes, I became nervous, and endeavoured to cry out, but could not. I was paralysed with the cold—cold that seemed to make my limbs rigid and benumb my vitals, for I saw that the man sitting before me was no longer a stranger—no mere friend or acquaintance—he had become Me!

I held up my hands to try to shut out the sight, and, as I did so, I saw that they were withered, and thin, and old. I pressed them to my brow to see if I were dreaming, and I found it shrivelled, and seamed, and puckered. And then I knew that this man—this fiend—had stolen my body and given me his.

Maddened with the discovery I rose to my feet—his feet—which tottered beneath me, and struck wildly at the vision of myself on the other seat. But I found my arms light as vapour, for they passed over his body, which went through them, giving me the impression of pain. It was a body of shade that had been given me for my own body of flesh and blood, which this wretch had stolen. By some sorcery we had indeed changed places.

"Sorcerer—demon!" I cried out, only to hear myself speaking with his sharp, cracked voice. When I saw myself sitting opposite to me, coolly addressing me in my own voice, I could no longer credit my senses—if, indeed, I had any of them at all left of my own.

"I dare say you think you are speaking loud now," he said.

I answered by shouting for the guard as loudly as I could.

"Ah, you might call a good deal louder than that. Why, if the carriage were full of passengers they could no more hear you than they could see you," he continued, chuckling, and screwing my features up into a hideously knowing grin, such as *I* could never have made them assume.

"You see, my friend, yours is a body of air, of shadow, insensible, impalpable to all but myself, just as it was to all but you when I entered the carriage. You wish, perhaps, to know who I am. Well, two years ago to-night, I was a passenger by this train. There was a collision with a stupid goods train, you see, and the result was that several passengers were injured. One of them was—well, it's no use mincing matters—killed on the spot. Quite so. It was I. Yes, I am what you would call a ghost, although we do not consider that just the correct term among ourselves—we have a better word for it. Now I have told you what I am, you will, doubtless, like to know what I want. Very good; you shall see."

The ghost in my body then began to feel in my pockets, from which he drew out my meerschaum, which he filled from my pouch and lit one of my matches.

"Ah," he proceeded, puffing like a steam engine, "you smoke very good stuff—natural leaf and Old Judge; not a bad mixture, though I prefer a little Cavendish with it myself. Not at all a bad body yours either," he went on, eyeing the form in which he was sitting; "not at all a bad body; and it fits me to a T, only a little short in the arms. By the way, I find one of your front teeth a little loose, so don't go and say I did that, when you come to yourself again; and your nose is a little long for me, but I dare say it blows none the worse for that." I shuddered as I saw him take out my pocket handkerchief and use it on that cherished organ of mine.

"Yes, I dare say now you feel the cold a little; I did at first, but it's nothing when you're used to it. I find your body very warm—being heavier than I am accustomed to wear; but it won't be for long. I require it 'positively for this night only,' as you say in your play-bills; and will return it uninjured by the time we get to Ashbourne. By-the-bye, let me beg of you to be a little careful how you throw your arms about so much as you did just now, for my body is of a more delicate construction than yours; and being so thin in substance, I am afraid you will chafe it under the arms.

"You will observe, ladies and gentlemen," he went on in lecturer's style, "that if I take a lighted match and insert it in the corner of the patient's eye, he will feel no pain." Saying this, my dreadful companion proceeded to illustrate his remark by making a dive at my shadowy eye with a burning match. I certainly felt no pain as the match burnt in my head.

"You will allow, after all you see, that my shape has its advantages," the ghost proceeded; "but it also has its disadvantages. Try the pipe now."

I tried to take the pipe—it dropped through my vapoury fingers. He placed it in my mouth; I could not hold it, nor get a whiff from it.

"Precisely so," said the ghost. "Now, this is just what has brought me here to-night. A great smoker all my life, doing my twelve pipes a day regularly, I have been defunct these two years, and during all that time I haven't had a smoke! Not a blessed draw. I miss my pipe dreadfully. There is a provision made for smokers down with us, you will understand; but we are governed by a board of directors, whose general incapacity equals that of many of your City boards. There is a stock of bodies kept for smokers, so that if you want to enjoy a pipe you must go into one of the bodies to get it. But if you will believe me, the supply is so notoriously insufficient to meet the demand that there is no chance whatever for a new ghost to get a smoke.

"When I entered the society all the bodies were out in use, and booked for three years in advance. My name has been down on the books for two years, and there is no chance of my getting a body allotted to me for a twelvemonth. Fancy two years without a smoke! Why, sir, the incompetence of our board is something awful. I can only explain the reason why we put up with such gross mismanagement in the other world is because we have become so used to it in this.

"Our constitutions, however, are being undermined to such an extent that the board has at length been coerced by popular feeling into passing a measure empowering ghosts to render themselves visible to a single individual at a time in order that they may effect a change of bodies for short periods, always with the consent of the person in question, for the purpose of indulging in a habit which the directors say they 'cannot, however, but characterise as pernicious and injurious.' George III. and George Washington, both members of the board, opposed the measure; they, however, were left in a ridiculously small minority. Under this new act I obtained your body."

"You never had my consent, fiend," I cried.

"It is vulgar to call names, my friend," the ghost replied, smoothing my moustache with my fingers; "but you are trifling. I asked you to change places with me, and you agreed, as you must be well aware. But, dear me! here we are at Ashbourne; but, however, I must finish my pipe—think of two years and not a blessed draw, my friend!"

The train was slackening speed. My companion leant out of the window puffing fast and furious.

"Plenty of time to change bodies," he said; "it shall be done in an instant, as soon as the train stops," and he continued blowing great clouds of smoke, till we pulled up at the station. He hurriedly knocked out the ashes of the tobacco, as the guard cried: "Change here; all change here, please."

A sudden glow of warmth seemed to pass over me as I rubbed my eyes, and found to my great delight my own smooth hands against my own unwrinkled cheeks. I looked up for my companion; he was gone; I was alone in the carriage.

I was greatly surprised, as I stepped on the platform, at being asked for my card by a very officious person; still more so at being summoned to the police court the following morning. The officious person stated that he was the secretary of the Anti-tobacco Alliance, and applied for a conviction against me, under one of the bye-laws of the company, for smoking in a railway carriage contrary to their regulations. He deposed to having seen me (only think, *me!*) leaning out of the window smoking a meerschaum pipe.

The guard testified that the carriage smelt very strongly of tobacco on our arrival, and that I was the only passenger. A meerschaum pipe, answering the officious person's description was found on my person. The case was clear, and I was fined two pounds. Nay, more—the case of my smoking in a railway carriage has been placarded at all the stations along the line, where I am hung up as a caution to the public, in a black frame, with my name and address and the amount of penalty enforced at full length.

It would have been useless to attempt any explanation to the magistrates. It is something to have set one's self right with the public. W. G. Kelly.

LOLA'S TWO LOVERS.

TWITTERS couldn't make it out at all. So sudden a change had come over his lot in life that he was completely bewildered by it. It was a very bad change, too, and in addition to being bewildered, he was also very sad indeed at heart.

Several times he had tried to sing, but it was no good; the notes that used to come so easily seemed to stick in his throat, and after an introductory chirp or two the trills which he once excelled at stuck and broke off short, and he lapsed into a moody silence, only relieved by a feeble fragmentary little twitter which was his way of saying that life seemed hardly worth living.

He was only a canary, but he had his feelings, and as he had been brought up in the lap of luxury, and had never known that there was such a thing as misfortune in the world, until it fell like a thunderbolt into a calm sea, the blow had very nearly broken his tender little heart.

A fortnight ago his daintily gilded cage had hung in one of the prettiest rooms imaginable. It had been the very luxury of imprisonment; in fact, it was not imprisonment at all, because the door had nearly always stood open, and he had had perfect liberty to go out when he chose, and flutter about the room, or, as he usually preferred to do, to make a tour of it perched on the shoulder, or sometimes on the outstretched finger, of his mistress—as beautiful and light-hearted a girl as ever listened to the love-song of a canary, or tried to imitate his notes with her own pretty lips.

And sometimes someone else used to be in the room—a well-dressed. good-looking young fellow, who was wont to playfully chaff his mistress about the rivalry that was supposed to exist between them. I mean, of course, between the man and the canary—"Lola's two lovers," as he used to call them. That was absurd enough, the idea of a man and a canary being rivals for a girl's affection; and yet there was no doubt about it, she seemed to love them both very much, and both of them certainly loved her, though whose love was the truest and the strongest time had yet to show.

And now this gilded cage, with the door fast shut, was hung up in quite a different sort of room; not an uncomfortable one by any means, but altogether lacking in the luxurious artistic refinement of his first home. The people, too, were quite different.

There was a stout woman, and a rather cross man who came in of an evening, generally tired, and usually a little out of temper, And there were also three or four noisy children, who used to come and run their nails along the bars of the cage, and poke bits of sugar between them, as if they would bribe him to try and imitate their unmusical whistling, as though the half-broken heart of a canary could be healed with sugar.

Sometimes he had tried to sing so as not to appear ungrateful, for the children really seemed to mean kindly, but when he broke down in his first trill they looked disgusted, and once or twice he heard them say:

"Well, they told us at the sale that he was a beautiful singer, but he doesn't seem able to sing a bit."

But, after all, what did they know about singing? No more than they did about the sorrows which had stifled his song and robbed him of the power of which he was once so proud. It was getting quite unbearable. A few weeks ago he had been wont to look out of the window at the birds in the garden with a sort of pitying contempt, considering them a kind of vagrants, without any settled home or people to attend to them when they wanted sugar or seed, or water for a bath.

But now he had come to think that they were better off than he was—at any rate, in his present circumstances. At the worst, they were free and could fly where they liked, but no one ever opened the door of his cage now, however much he fluttered against the bars, and this idea had grown upon him until the desire to escape had become as nearly a passion as a canary could be possessed with.

At last an opportunity offered itself. One of the children, when there was nobody else in the room, opened his cage-door and tried to catch him. He eluded the intruding hand, slipped out over the little red arm, and in another moment he had fluttered out of an open window and perched on a green tree, in the full light and warmth of the midsummer afternoon sun.

He rested there a bit after his excitement, and then went farther afield, but he found flying in the open air a very laborious business, and the more he saw of the great new world into which he had escaped the less he liked it. It was too big and unhomely-looking, and it seemed peopled with dreadful creatures.

At last, after much flying and fluttering hither and thither, he had reached a pleasant place indeed, like an enormous garden, full of trees and flowers, and a multitude of white stones and little marble buildings that looked like houses, although no one ever seemed to go into them or come out of them.

He felt quite at home there, and happier than he had done since he was taken away from his first home, and at last when he was perched on the top of a new white stone with a little mound of green turf beneath it, his gift of song came back, and he suddenly felt all his sorrows fall away from him, and he poured forth such a flood of silver song that all the other birds in trees about him stopped and listened, it might have been a trifle enviously, as amateurs might listen to a trained professional.

In the midst of his song the heavens suddenly darkened, a fierce wind, hot and suffocating, swept through the trees, bright dazzling streams of flame leapt hither and thither, and a great roaring noise completely drowned his song. And then everything grew darker still, and the song ceased for ever.

That same afternoon two young fellows were sitting at the open window of the smoking-room of one of the clubs in Pall Mall. One of them was the Hon. Roger Landon, a dark, strong-featured, good-looking young fellow of about twenty-seven, and the other was a fair-haired youth three or four years his junior, with an open, honest, or rather simple-looking face, save for the indefinable expression of what the French call *savoir faire*, which is almost invariably found on the face of a man who has had two or three years' experience in the ways of the metropolis.

This was Mr. Freddie Dumville, the Hon. Roger's pupil, and *fidus Achates*. Both were smoking—Freddie a cigarette, and the Hon. Roger a large and strong cigar. Both were looking anything but cheerful, and both puffed the smoke out from between their lips in the intervals of their conversation in long meditative streams which wreathed themselves into blue spirals above their heads in the heavy atmosphere of the smoking-room.

"And so the poor little girl really took it to heart to such a dreadful extent as that?" said Roger after a long silence. "If I'd only known——"

"Ah, yes, if you'd only known. That's what one always says when the harm's done. Of course, I don't mean to say that as a man of the world you could have done anything else than you did, and, as the world would say, you behaved very handsomely to her; but she wasn't a common sort, you know, and, really, Roger, she was awfully fond of you. I suppose that is why she took it so much to heart. It was that, and what the doctor called heart disease when I called him in, that carried her off so quickly."

"Hang it all, man, don't talk in that confoundedly matter-of-fact tone! It's next door to accusing me of murdering the girl. I did what I could under the circumstances. I was just as fond of her as she was of me, but you know the awful mess I should have got into if I hadn't married Lady Janet and her £200,000. Why, I couldn't even have kept the establishment going for another six months, and after all, you know, I couldn't have expected this to happen when, if everything had gone on all right, I could have——"

"No, you couldn't have, old man. Lola wasn't that sort. In fact, she was a lot better than a good many who wouldn't have walked on the same side of the street with her."

"Yes, yes, I know she was, and that makes it all the worse. Well, go on. As the honeymoon has been interrupted for me to come and hear the news, I may as well hear it all. Tell me what you've done."

The Hon. Roger turned a shade or two paler as he ground the words savagely between his clenched teeth. His friend noticed the change in his manner not altogether with disapproval. He looked half pityingly across the window at him, and then went on in a voice that might have been a good deal steadier:

"Well, I did as you told me. As soon as the knot was tied, I went and broke it to her as gently as I could, and—well, as I have told you, it killed her. The doctor I called in called it heart disease, and so it was, I suppose.

"I buried her in Norwood Cemetery, and gave it out that she was the wife of a friend of mine who had sailed a week or two before for Gibraltar. Then I put the place into the hands of an auctioneer and had everything sold, because I didn't think you'd want to keep any mementoes of the episode, and I gave the same man the job of letting the house, and—well, I think that's all."

"Yes, you did quite right, old man, and you've behaved like a regular brick, and put me under an everlasting obligation. There is only one thing I should have liked you to have kept, but of course you wouldn't know that, and that was poor little Twitters, the canary. He went, too, I suppose, with the other things?"

"Oh, yes, he was bought, I believe, by a Norwood gentleman, who was something in the City. He promised he should have a good home, and I hope he has. He was a jolly little bird. I say, I think we're going to have a thunderstorm."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the first flash of lightning blazed out, followed by a peal of thunder that set all the windows in the club-house rattling. The two sat and watched the storm in silence for nearly half an hour, and then they got up and went to dinner.

Roger Landon ate little and drank much, but the liquor seemed to have no effect upon him save to still further darken the sombre humour that had fallen upon him. Dinner over, he got up and said:

"I shall go to the cemetery to-morrow. Give me a bit of a sketch so that I can find the grave. No, old man, I don't want you to come with me. I want to go alone, and I shall."

"Very well, if you will, though I think you'd better let me come. Of course, if you won't; well—there you are, you can hardly miss it with that, because it is right on the side of the walk."

While he was speaking Freddie had made a rough, rapid sketch on a leaf of his pocket-book, which he tore out and handed across the table to his friend.

That night the Hon. Roger Landon walked the streets with an aimless, feverish energy until nearly two o'clock in the morning, and then let himself into the bachelor chambers which he had retained until Lady Jane's town-house was ready for occupation at the end of the interrupted honeymoon.

As soon as it was light he let himself out again, and started off towards Victoria Station. There he loitered about impatiently until the first train for Norwood started. When he got to the cemetery the gates were still closed, but the gatekeeper was up and half-a-crown opened them.

Refusing the man's proferred guidance, he set out to find the grave alone, and, thanks to Freddie's plan, he had little difficulty in doing so.

The headstone was already up, and on it he read, through the first tears that his eyes had known for many a year, the simple inscription:

"Lola, the beloved wife of Leslie Rogers. Born January 21st, 1873. Died June 25th, 1894. Whom the Gods love die young."

When he had read this inscription his eyes fell to the neatly turfed mould below the stone, and there, with the dew of the early morning glistening on its golden features, lay a little dead canary.

A few minutes later one of the gravediggers going to his work passed along the path, and saw a well-dressed man, with a white, set face, kneeling beside the grave, lifting one of the sods with his hands and putting something underneath it. As he stopped involuntarily at the strange sight, Roger looked up. The man touched his hat respectfully, and said:

"Morning, sir. It was me as dug the poor young lady's grave a fortnight ago. Yesterday afternoon, just afore the thunderstorm, there was a canary singing something wonderful on that stone. I suppose the storm would have killed it."

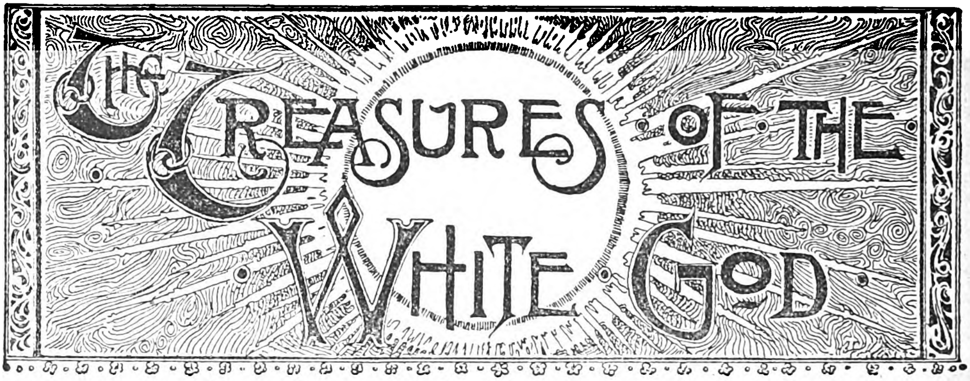
"Yes," said Roger. "It died here, and I have just buried it."

"Yes, to be sure, poor little thing," said the man. "No offence, sir, but perhaps you might be the young lady's husband. I heard at the funeral that he wasn't in England then."

"No, I wasn't," said Roger, rising from his knees. "I have just come back. Yes, this lady was my wife, and I want you to look after the grave properly. Will you?"

"I will, sir, thank you, sir!" said the gravedigger, touching his hat again, and staring, open-eyed, at the sovereign lying in his rough, brown palm. "Ah, poor gentleman. He's a real gentleman, too, he is," he went on soliloquising to himself, as he watched Roger walking slowly down the path towards the cemetery gate.

George Griffith.



THE TREASURES OF THE WHITE GOD

SUMMARY.

Robert Lane, escaped convict No. 407, *alias* Adrian Burgoyne, is tracked to the World's Fair Grounds at Chicago. He is last seen, after an exciting chase by Mr. Inspector Grey and his assistant, Detective Dean, locked in a burning boat on the lake. Detective Dean finds a cipher in the convict's bed, which he sells to Mr. Richard Sheldon for £2 000. A Col. Lytle calls on Sheldon. They recall Burgoyne's history as follows: Ralph Ringold, when dying in Mexico, left a packet containing £6,000 in the hands of Burgoyne for his friend Richard Sheldon, whom he appointed guardian of his daughter Patrice's fortune. Burgoyne overheard Lytle and Sheldon arranging to appropriate the treasure, and threatened to expose them. They caused him to be convicted of a crime, and sentenced to penal servitude for life.

They then discovered, when too late, that he had with him in cipher the secret to Ralf Ringold's hidden fortune and treasures in Mexico.

The cipher is now in their possession, but Patrice Ringold has the key.

Adrian Burgoyne escapes from the burning boat.

CHAPTER VII.

DISGUISED.

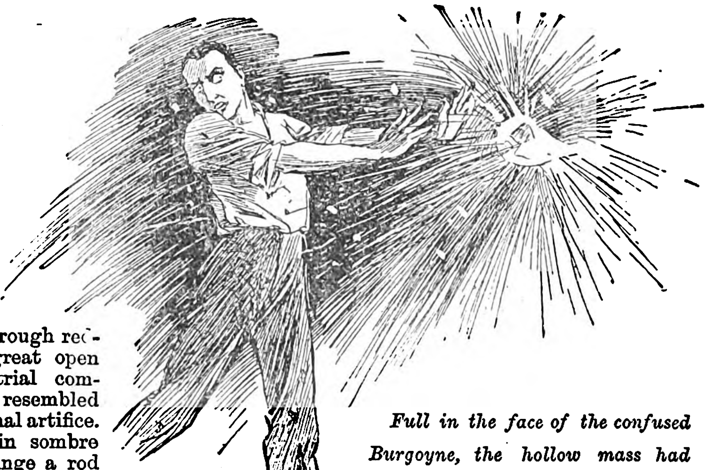
A cold north-east wind had sprung up since sunset, and the night boded chill and discomfort for the lonely refugee.

A forlorn figure on the dreary landscape, a token of warmth was cast about him, as two hours after leaving his hiding-place of the day the convict neared the source of the flame that had been a guiding star to him across unfamiliar stretches of sand and prairie.

It proved to be a great roaring blast furnace, but surrounded by walls and a gate.

Near by, however, were grouped a score or more of kindred factories. Here the cupola of a wire mill showed, there the gaunt staunch chimney of glass works.

Viewed as a whole, through red-lighted windows and great open doors, the vast industrial community of night workers resembled gnomes engaged in infernal artifice. Here a figure garbed in sombre moleskin suit would plunge a rod into the seething heart of some towering furnace, to bring forth its fiery life-blood in bubbling, scintillating streams. Beyond the dazzling glare of a bursting ingot of steel would shower marvellous fireworks across and around a group of dusky, brawny workers, and, flaring out, seem to leave a grim black hole in the picture.



Full in the face of the confused Burgoyne, the hollow mass had exploded.

At the open door of the glass factory Adrian Burgoyne paused, with a sigh of exhaustion. He experienced a longing for the warm glow of the seething pots; he bestowed a hungry look at the second-shift men enjoying their wholesome lunch from tin pails and little wicker-baskets. Then falling to smoking, they began pelting each other with the crusts and remnants of their meal.

The wayfarer thought of Lazarus. Each one of these poor artizans was a veritable Dives in the profligacy of his waste of the food that to the refugee would be a rare morsel of delight. As a bell rang, and the men sprang to relieve the night gang at their work, Burgoyne stole through the open door, glided to a bench away in the shadow, and nestled there, enjoying the luxury of perfect rest, and the warm, grateful glow of the heated air of the place.

Then he fell to cautiously fishing for the remnants of food within his reach. Tired nature revived under the combined influences of food and shelter. Want was at rest now. He half closed his eyes, nodded, slumbered ere he was aware of it, and awoke with a start, struggling to his feet and rubbing his eyes, for the moment unable to comprehend and analyse his environment.

"The glass works," he murmured to himself, with arousing faculties. "How long have I slept?"

"Out of the way, there."

He was crossing the space between the bench and the door as the mandate rang out. A worker, swaying a great mass of molten glass on the end of his blowpipe, was coming directly towards him, intent on spinning it across the foaming wheel ere it cooled.

Burgoyne sprang aside towards the furnace to evade a collision with the man.

"Not that way! Hang it, man! Stand aside."

A second voice, more alarming than the first, announced a new peril.

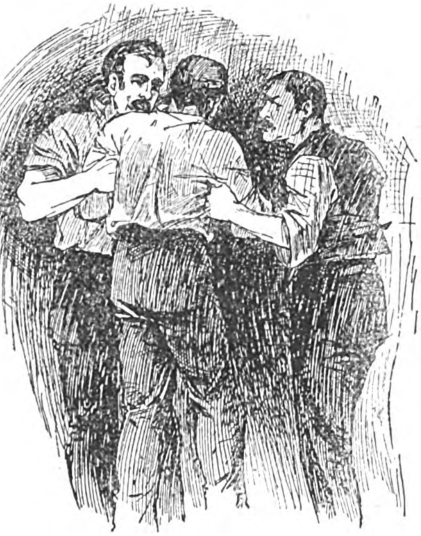
So confusing were the contrary injunctions, that, bewildered, Burgoyne tried to make a dash for the door.

He recoiled with a shock and a gasp of alarm as he did so, for the forward movement had landed him bolt upright against a second workman.

The latter was blowing out his glass ingot into a balloon-shaped bag. Against the mass Burgoyne stumbled.

A sound like the collapsing of a gas-ball echoed on the air. It was mingled with a wild scream of mortal agony.

For, full in the face of the confused Burgoyne, the hollow mass had exploded. A fiery thrill traversed face, hands, and neck; a thousand pricking, darting splinters of flame seemed to permeate his being.



A couple of workmen grasped him.

Half blinded, agonised with the frightful hurt, he knocked the worker fairly from his feet in a dash forward.

A large tub stood near the door filled to the brim with some solution.

He fairly floundered down beside it. He thought it water. He made a great dive to pierce its soothing, cooling depths to allay the frightful pain caused by the searing contact of the red-hot glass.

"Not there!"

"Stop!"

Two separate voices rang out the simultaneous warning.

Too late! The sufferer heard not, heeded not. Clear to the shoulders he ran head and neck, up to the elbows he dug his smarting hands into the cooling liquid.

Then swaying, half suffocated, he reeled back.

A couple of workmen grasped him on either side, as he bade fair to totter.

"Hurt?" queried one.

Adrian Burgoyne moaned inarticulately.

"He's done it!" muttered the other. "Get him to the bench. He's got a double dose and the last one—"

The speaker ended his comment with a gruesome and significant look at the sufferer.

Then they led him to the bench, propped up his head on a pillow formed of their coats, forced some fiery decoction poured from a flask between his lips, and left him.

His frame racked with vague, torturing pains, his senses swaying, his brain a maze, the ensuing few hours and their occurrences were a partial blank to Adrian Burgoyne in after life.

He was dimly conscious that some accident other than contact with the burning glass had occurred to him, but he could not divine what. He realised that a new weakness, the incipient delirium of fever, was beginning to riot through his brain. He was near the city. Suppose, taken ill, he should be sent thither. The case would be reported to the police and the police would recognise him.

No one saw him as he struggled to his feet, oppressed by fears that drove him to seek a safer refuge. He staggered outside the glass factory. The fresh, brisk air revived him somewhat, but he stumbled on his way like a drunken man.

One hour or ten, two miles or twenty—he took no comprehending heed of the lapse of time, the extent of territory traversed. Warning instincts drove him from the direction of the city. He pursued a blinded course, much as would a sick animal seeking only a quiet spot where it could lie down and die. At last overworked nature gave way. He had been threading the streets of some little town. Across a stone doorstep, above which gleamed a red light, he sank, utterly done out.

When he again opened his eyes he was in a large, warm room, lying on a couch. It was brightly lighted, but ominously still. At a desk sat a man writing. The scratching of his pen and the monotonous ticking of a clock over his head alone broke the stillness of the apartment.

Where was he? The refugee could reason out that he had fainted away in the street, and had been housed by some charitable soul, but where?

Ah, voices! He roused himself. A man entered the room and spoke to the writer at the desk. He pointed curiously at the recumbent Burgoyne.

"What's that?" he asked. "A drunk!"

"No; some poor fellow done dead out. Half-past two! Sound the gong, will you?"

A clanging echo jarred the nerves of the convict. It reminded him of his late home, the prison.

He started, he gasped, he shrank. Was he dreaming? Were his old fears, the haunting dread of every waking hour since his escape, assuming tangible form and substance?

For, at the sound of the gong, a score of men began to file into the room. They were belted, helmeted, uniformed, and upon every breast gleamed the official badge of authority of an officer of the law.

"A police station!" fairly chattered the refugee. "What fate sent me here?"

He sat up, and glanced steadily towards the door. Then, with a shock, his eyes became riveted on a blackboard just behind him.

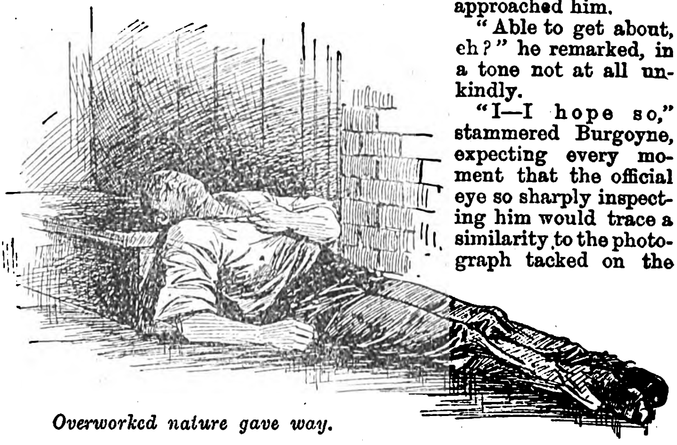
It bore all kinds of written and printed notices—strayed, lost and stolen descriptions, municipal proclamations, department orders, and a little handbill, containing a small photograph in one corner, while across its top the ominous words: "Escaped—Reward."

His picture, *his* description! The notice scattered broadcast by the prison authorities! Was he safe nowhere? Was there no corner of the earth where this hideous reminder of the past would spring from the depths to confront him?

The officers filed out of the station as they had filed in. The refugee shrank back as the man at the desk arose and approached him.

"Able to get about, eh?" he remarked, in a tone not at all unkindly.

"I—I hope so," stammered Burgoyne, expecting every moment that the official eye so sharply inspecting him would trace a similarity to the photograph tacked on the blackboard not two feet above his head.

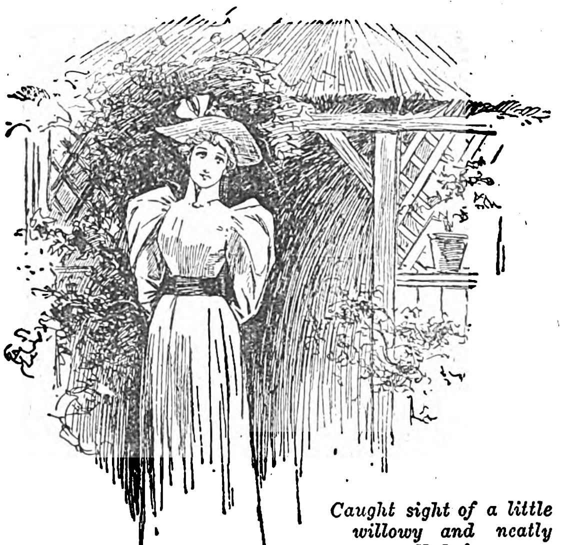


Overworked nature gave way.

"All right—tramping it? in hard luck? We found you outside the door. Here, follow me. I'll get you something to eat, and start you on your way tinkered up a bit."

Burgoyne rallied his faculties, and followed the officer. He had not been recognised; he would soon be able to leave the station. He would be wary how he came into contact with the law again. He was believed to be dead, but that intelligence had probably not yet reached the suburban stations, and he marvelled that the officer, with the reward and description probably fresh in his mind, had not traced the resemblance between the man he had cared for and the photograph.

"Here you are—coarse prison fare, but you look as if you won't be particular," remarked the man, leading Burgoyne into a small room, and pointing to a table on which was a tin cup and a loaf of bread, and then to a little stove containing a steaming pot of coffee.



Caught sight of a little willowy and neatly apparelled form.

"I do not know how to thank you!" murmured Burgoyne.

"Don't try; that's all right," bluffly responded the officer. "You can tramp on, or sleep here till morning, as you choose. There's a sink and a towel in the corner yonder. You look as if you needed them."

With these words he left the room. With these words, too, Adrian approached the sink.

Just above it was a little mirror. About to plunge his hands into the water, he chanced to glance within the looking-glass.

"Great Heavens! It cannot be possible!" The wild, uncontrollable words were forced from his lips spasmodically.

With a vivid shock, he recoiled, and then, held spellbound, he stared into the little mirror as if fascinated.

For the first time since he had assumed the *rôle* of Robert Lane did convict 407 view the presentment of his reflected features.

He stared, he gasped, he marvelled. This Adrian Burgoyne? This the convict, the refugee, the placarded fugitive of the State?

He did not know himself. He had longed for a disguise that would prove impenetrable to friend and foe alike. It was awarded him.

For the fire on the boat had denuded him of all hirsute appendages on face and head. Even the eyebrows, the lashes were gone.

The plunge into the vat at the glass works had been a dip into some corroding fluid employed in treating the ingots. It had bronzed face, neck, and arm. It had changed, as if by magic, every familiar token of his face.

Only the eyes retained their old-time look. Brown as a Malay, changed, peculiar, convict No. 407 had assumed a completely new identity.

Through hardship, torture, suffering, the consummation had been attained. He was "disguised" indeed. He was safe. A victim of fire, flood, and the art chemical, Adrian Burgoyne had emerged into an identity that would baffle the shrewdest detective on earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KEY TO A FORTUNE.

BOLDNESS—that was the leading characteristic of Richard Sheldon's nature. Prompt, decisive action in an emergency was the merit with which his ally, Colonel Lytle, seconded his employer's interests.

"The girl" had the key to the cryptogram. Ralph Ringold's deluded and neglected daughter had the solution to the cipher message which was a guide to a fortune rivalling the dowry of a princess.

"It looks like plain sailing to me," announced Lytle, after the revelations of his accomplice. "The matter is clear—a fortune is hidden; that bit of parchment in your hand tells where. The daughter of the rightful owner has the key to the same. The girl must be seen."

"Yes; you must visit Patrice at once."

"Me!"

"Why not? I have never seen nor approached her. I have studiously remained in the background, refusing to appear, for fear of later complications, intrusting the care of the girl to you."

"And as your agent I have faithfully carried out your instructions."

"And Patrice?"

"Has passed the last four years of her life with a widow—a Mrs. Loring."

"Where?"

"About forty miles south of the city, at a little hamlet called Lynde."

"Very good. She has been led to suppose that she is an orphan and a pauper. She believes me to be a very distant relative, who, from sheer charity, has provided her with a humble but comfortable home. Let that impression remain. The girl is a problem for later consideration, although I do not see how she can ever gain an inkling of the truth. She is safe where she is. Allow her to remain there, a dead issue in the case, except for what she may know concerning this cryptographic message."

"But," interpolated Lytle, "if she is to read it—to translate it—she must, perforce, obtain a knowledge of its import."

Sheldon scowled irritably.

"Why should she? Are you not keen enough to first learn in what guise this alleged key exists? It may be a mere alphabet that she possesses. If not, and it is some knowledge of an obsolete Aztec or cipher system of signs mutually acquired by herself and her father, you can lull her suspicions by some specious story and submit the parchment message in fragmentary parts. I leave it to you. When will you go?"

"At once."

That was the agreement, and that was Colonel Lytle's intention, but circumstances forced a delay he had not anticipated. He was interested in horse racing, and details of a match for the ensuing week required his attention. Engrossed in these, a day was consumed, and it was not until the afternoon of the one following that he left the train at the little village of Lynde, bent on a visit to the daughter of the man who, in his blind confidence, had fallen a victim to the designs of unscrupulous plotters.

The cottage occupied by Mrs. Loring abutted on a stretch of garden, wood, and meadow combined, that led to the river, a few hundred yards distant. A rare sylvan retreat, and as the schemer came near and caught sight of a little willowy and neatly apparelled form near a rude, rustic summer-house, a flash of sentiment brushed aside momentarily the tarnish, the dust, the blight of a profligate life.

Only for a moment, however. Then, an apprehension of the peace, beauty, and content of rural life gave way to sordid considerations, and the old sinister expression returned to his hardened, worldly features.

"Zounds! what a face!"

Colonel Lytle had opened the gate, and advanced, unceremoniously and unannounced, down the gravel path. He came upon the one occupant of the garden unobserved. Gazing across the shrubbery to where she stood trailing a troublesome vine into its proper place, transfixed, he watched the graceful form, the wild rose face.

It was Patrice—the daughter of the plundered Ralph Ringold, the victim of Richard Sheldon's iniquitous designs—and the rare innocence of feature, the open, frank trustfulness of the calm hazel eye, told that her gentle nature had known little of guile or guilt, even at a distance.

No marvel was it that her bonny face entranced the Colonel! Since he had last seen her, the girl had grown into a woman, the promise of the bud had expanded into a flower of golden loveliness. Form and feature were perfect as those of a nymph, and the winning beauty of a soul, pure as that of an angel, looked forth from the expressive eyes.

"Patrice!"

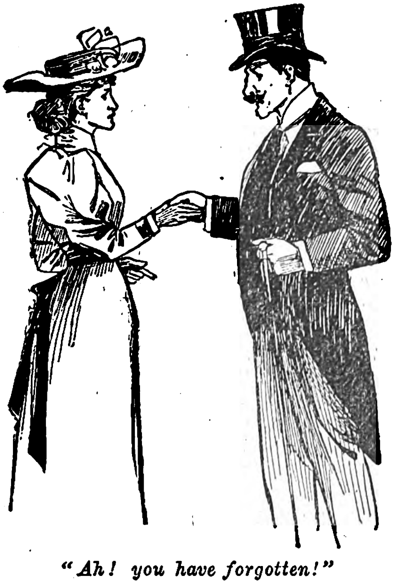
The fair young girl started like a shy bird as the tones of the Colonel broke the silence. With a pretty confused blush on her winsome face, she regarded him dubiously.

"Ah, you have forgotten!—you do not remember me!" he exclaimed, simulating the bluff heartiness of some fatherly friend, and extending his hand and taking her reluctant own in a close, caressing grasp.

"I fancy I do, but——"

"Four years, with only a flitting visit between, means much for a child grown to be a maiden," pursued Lytle. "I come from Mr. Richard Sheldon."

"My relative—my father's cousin?" interrupted Patrice animatedly. "I know you now, sir. You are Colonel Lytle. Mrs. Loring has spoken of you so often. And Mr. Sheldon—why does he never come—never send me word? It is so lonely to feel that one has no warm friends, no thoughtful relatives through all these years, while others have so many."

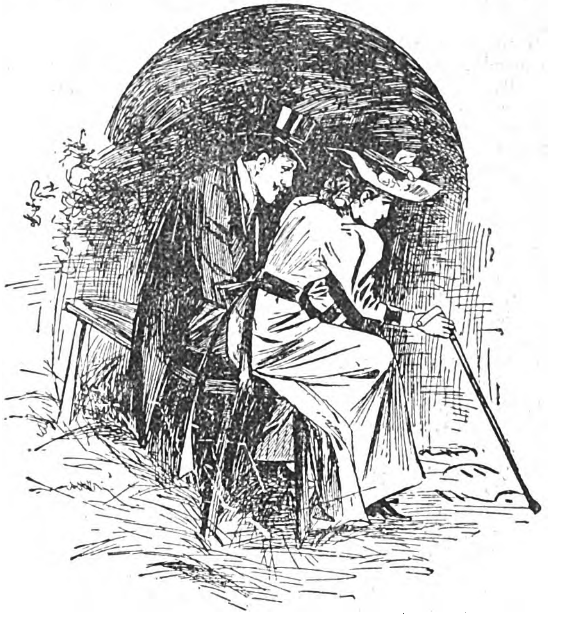


"Ah! you have forgotten!"

"We won't cage this bird always," muttered Lytle, under his breath, and with a keen glance at the girl's sensitive face. "She is beginning to pine for congenial companionship. She is beginning to deplore her solitary lot. Zounds! if I was a younger man! No, Patrice," he spoke aloud abruptly. "I do not wish to see Mrs. Loring yet; my business this time is with you personally."

Patrice fluttered expectantly, curiously. She had made a motion as if to lead the way to the cottage. At a courtly wave of her visitor's hand she sank to a rustic bench.

"Some serious business complications regarding the affairs of your dead father have recently arisen," he announced prefatorily.



"Is it anything like this, or this, or this?"

"Yes, Colonel Lytle."

"Of course," lied the sleek knave, "they promise no benefit in a money way to himself or his heirs; they refer to interests where others who trusted him are concerned, and where Mr. Sheldon feels right should be done, if possible."

"I do not understand," murmured Patrice vaguely.

"It is scarcely necessary for you to do so. We simply wish to clear up a cloud upon some mine property in which your dead father held a slight interest years ago. It is one of those old Mexican claims—almost valueless, and tangled up in numberless legal complications. The original deed was a scrawl—a lot of unintelligible hieroglyphics. Your father seemed to understand them, and we thought——"

He paused at an animated and intelligent gesture from Patrice.

"I know what you mean!" she cried—"the old Aztec alphabet! Is it anything like this, or this, or this?"

She leant to the smooth sandy path in front of the bench as she spoke, and traced three curious characters in turn.

Colonel Lytle looked excited. The symbols were in a line with those contained in the parchment scroll.

"Why, exactly!" he announced with enthusiasm. "Wait. This shows it better."

He ventured to bring to light a copy of the parchment scroll with which Sheldon had provided him.

Holding a single line into view, he advanced it for the girl's inspection.

"How is that?" he queried.

"I recognise the characters. Yes, they are part of the alphabet."

"Then you can read this?"

"No, Colonel Lytle."

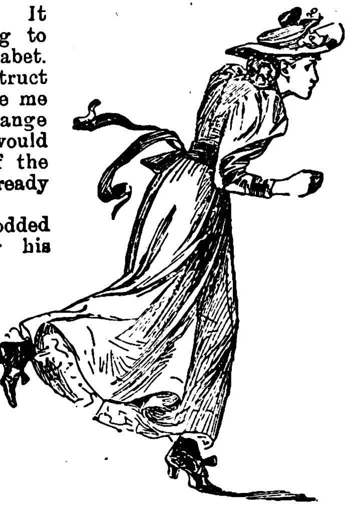
"No!"

Her visitor's voice was full of disappointment.

“No; you see, sir, I never did understand them entirely. I was quite young. Do not be disappointed till I explain, please.”

Patrice had read the overwhelming disappointment that came like a flash into Lytle's face, and hastened to dispel it, her ingenious nature being for ever on the alert to allay trouble.

“When my poor father was in Mexico,” she proceeded, “he used to write me long letters. I was only twelve years old then. He would send me curios, write me interesting descriptions of what he saw there, and one day he sent me a copy of what he called a jargon Aztec cipher. It had signs corresponding to every letter in the alphabet. More to amuse than instruct me, very often he wrote me a brief note in this strange sign-language, and I would study it out by aid of the key alphabet he had already sent me.”



She sped away.

“I understand,” nodded the Colonel, gnawing his moustache nervously, divided between hope and impatience.

“That was so many years ago that I do not believe I could translate a single letter now, but the key—”

“Ah, the key?” murmured the Colonel eagerly.

“That I always preserved.”

Lytle's eyes shone.

“I put it in the little compartment at the back of my mother's pocket Bible, and——”

She started to her feet, with a little cry of dismay.

“You have it still?” queried the Colonel quickly and anxiously.

“No, but—how careless of me. Only last evening I took a walk to the cliff near the river. I was reading the Bible for some time. When the storm came up I hastened home, and in my hurry I must have forgotten it.”

“Then it must be there now.”

“Certainly it must, for it is a spot few frequent, and then too——”

“Let us hasten and see,” suggested the Colonel.

“I will go alone,” dissented Patrice. “I know a short cut, and am familiar with the windings of the paths. I will not be gone ten minutes.”

She sped away, light of foot as a fawn.

Light of heart as a zephyr, too, little dreaming that the mission of the moment was destined to change the entire current of all her fair young life, and place her, ere another hour had passed, face to face with her fate!

(*To be continued.*)

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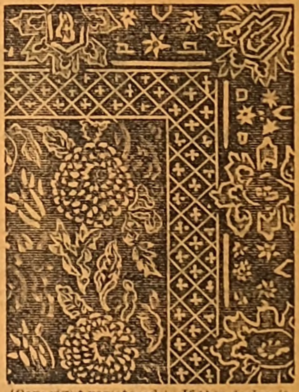

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